

University of Chicago Library

GIVEN BY

Beside the main topic this Book also treats of

Subject No.

On page

Subject No.

On page

CARDS MADE

Baptist Union Theological Seminary
LIBRARY.

Library No. 2621 Shelf No. 145

Purchased from the Estate of

GEORGE B. IDE, D. D.,

Of Springfield, Mass.

Chicago, March 1st, 1873.



THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

EDINBURGH: PRINTED BY THOMAS CONSTABLE,

FOR

EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS.

LONDON HAMILTON, ADAMS, AND CO.

CAMBRIDGE MACMILLAN AND CO.

DUBLIN M'GLASHAN AND GILL.

GLASGOW JAMES MACLEHOSE.

THE
SERMON ON THE MOUNT

LECTURES DELIVERED

BY

REV. WALTER C. SMITH, M.A.

AUTHOR OF 'THE BISHOP'S WALK,' 'HYMNS OF CHRIST, AND THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE,' ETC.

EDINBURGH

EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS

1867.

BS 2532
S64

1 mol
Ethanol

P R E F A C E.

THESE discourses are simply the ordinary Morning Lectures delivered, from week to week, to my Congregation during the Winter of 1865-6; and, with some slight exceptions (to be noted by and by), they are now printed exactly as they were preached. In general, such a statement could not be received as any excuse for the defects of a published book, but would be rather an aggravation of every offence; for though a minister, having to produce a certain amount of more or less edifying matter once a week, may, excusably enough, utter a good deal of commonplace, or even give occasional currency to half-considered opinions which he can afterwards review and modify, yet he is not at liberty to inflict these on the general public, or to give permanent shape to that which has no claim to permanent usefulness. Nor would I have thought of publishing these Lectures, but for the fact that one of them became the subject of controversy, or more properly of condemnation, in the Free Church Presbytery of

Glasgow, under whose jurisdiction I am placed, and in this way obtained, at least, a local importance, apart altogether from its intrinsic merits. Portions of it,—sentences selected here and there,—were read in that Court, and appeared in the public press; and these, as it seemed to me, were fitted, however little intended, to produce a wrong impression as to the general character of my teaching. In justice to myself, therefore, I have thought it best to publish the entire series. In justice also to the Church, this appears to be the right course; for it is only fair that she should be put in possession of the whole matter on which her Courts have still to decide. Hence these discourses are not printed because the author considers them specially worthy of such permanent form. They have no claim to critical nicety, or exegetical learning, or even to any peculiar novelty of thought or illustration. They are simply ordinary congregational lectures which have had the misfortune to be denounced as containing heretical doctrine; and they are now published because neither should the accused be condemned, nor should the judge pronounce sentence, on isolated fragments of what ought to be regarded as one indivisible whole. I deprecate no severity of criticism, then, whether ecclesiastical or literary, but I make this statement, that the critic may have the whole case before him when he applies himself to his task.

With some exceptions, these Lectures are printed just .

as they were preached. The exceptions are these :— the fourth of this series, which the Presbytery specially found fault with, formed originally two discourses, and these have been reduced to their present dimensions, first, by throwing into an Appendix an illustration which was liable to misunderstanding, and which had been more fully handled in a subsequent lecture ; and secondly, by omitting some recapitulation not necessary when the discourse could be read at a sitting. Besides these, I think there are no other alterations which are not simply verbal, and of no moment whatever. Certainly no changes have been made on the character of the doctrine complained of. So far, these Lectures are now given in their integrity and entireness.

It would not be fair to make this book a medium of controversial discussion with the Presbytery ; nor have I the slightest intention of doing so. But I may take the liberty of asking my readers to compare the views given in the first and fourth of these Lectures, with the opinions of a few recognised orthodox divines in Appendix No. II. I could easily have multiplied them considerably ; but in the meanwhile these may suffice. Let me add, that I am not to be understood as either accepting all their views, or as claiming their adherence to all mine. I simply give those extracts to show how some able and sound theologians have looked at those questions.

There is only one other point to which I would refer here, at present. In speaking of the whole Old Testament Scriptures as being at once fulfilled and annulled in Christ, I would wish my readers to remember the distinction between the authority to impose law, and the authority to teach truth. For the former of these may be abolished, while the latter remains as valid as ever. A book may be annulled as statute law, and yet lose none of its value as a revelation. The ordinances of circumcision and the passover are no longer binding on me; but they have not on that account lost authority to instruct me. On the contrary, when read in the light of the New Testament, they have even more than their original meaning; they teach deeper things now than they ever taught of old. Lest therefore it might be supposed that I meant to deprive the ancient Scriptures of all kind of authority, I was careful, from the beginning, to combine the *fulfilling* with the *annulling* of them. The one word was meant to restrict the meaning of the other. They were annulled only as far as they were fulfilled; but they still remained, in various ways, full of profit and Divine instruction. The reader will see that this runs through the whole discourses complained of.

For the rest, I regret to publish Lectures which were not prepared with that view, and in which I can see many things which, in other circumstances, I

should have probably qualified to some extent. Yet on calmly reviewing them, even as they now stand, I cannot suppose that they will tend to disturb the faith even of any of God's little ones; for had I thought so, I would much rather have borne any amount of blame than vindicated myself at such a cost to others. But I issue them, honestly hoping that they may do some good, and nowise dreading that they can do any harm.

WALTER SMITH.

GLASGOW, 1867.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I.—GENERAL OUTLINE—(MATT. v. 1, 2), . . .	1
II.—INTRODUCTORY BEATITUDES—(v. 3-12), . . .	20
III.—INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER—(v. 13-16), . . .	37
IV.—THEME OF THE DISCOURSE—(v. 17-19), . . .	52
V.—THE LAW KEPT BY LOVE—(v. 21-26), . . .	82
VI.—THE LAW KEPT BY LOVE—(v. 27-32), . . .	100
VII.—THE LAW KEPT BY LOVE—(v. 33-37), . . .	116
VIII.—THE LAW KEPT BY LOVE—(v. 38-42), . . .	131
IX.—THE LAW KEPT BY LOVE—(v. 43-48), . . .	146
X.—THE LAW KEPT BY SINCERITY—(vi. 1-4), . . .	162
XI.—THE LAW KEPT BY SINCERITY—(vi. 5-15), . . .	178
XII.—THE LAW KEPT BY SINCERITY—(vi. 16-18), . . .	193
XIII.—THE LAW KEPT BY FAITH—(vi. 19-21), . . .	208
XIV.—THE LAW KEPT BY FAITH—(vi. 22-24), . . .	224
XV.—THE LAW KEPT BY FAITH—(vi. 25-34), . . .	239
XVI.—THE LAW KEPT BY FAITH—(vii. 7-11), . . .	256

XVII.—THE LAW KEPT BY SYMPATHY—(VII. 1-6), . . .	PAGE 276
XVIII.—THE LAW KEPT BY SYMPATHY—(VII. 6, 12), . . .	292
XIX.—CONCLUSION—THE STRAIT GATE—(VII. 13, 14), . . .	308
XX.—CONCLUSION—FALSE PROPHETS—(VII. 15-20), . . .	323
XXI.—CONCLUSION—THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS—(VII. 21-29),	338
APPENDIX—	
No. I.	353
No. II.	357

I.

GENERAL OUTLINE.

‘And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain ; and when he was set, his disciples came unto him : and he opened his mouth, and taught them.’—MATT. v. 1, 2.

THE great discourse, commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount, was so called because it was preached on one or other of the hills that skirt the western shores of Gennesaret. Tradition still points to a certain high ground there, and calls it ‘The Mount of Beatitudes ;’ but tradition also shows the spot where Peter’s cock crew, and the tree that Zaccheus climbed ; and altogether there has been such a vile traffic in the discovery of holy places, that we must exercise a wise scepticism in regard to such matters, when we have no more reliable guide than tradition. All we can be sure of is, that this discourse was spoken by our Lord on some green hill-side near Capernaum, overlooking the sea. In those days this was a fair and populous region, a well-watered garden, dotted with pleasant villages ; its valleys covered with corn, and its hills with vines and olive-trees, while Peter and his brother-fishermen studded the lake with their sails, or plied their nets

along the shore. Centuries of oppression, however, have sadly changed the scene. It is now a waste and desolate land, and for the busy throng of fishers, the solitary water-fowl wades among the reeds and rushes.

Sitting down on the mount, then, as the manner was, with his disciples immediately round him, Jesus addressed the crowd that had gathered, at the report of his miracles, from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from beyond the Jordan, and even from the regions about Tyre and Sidon. A very mingled audience, no doubt, yet surely a highly favoured one,—privileged, certainly, to hear the most wonderful sermon ever preached by mortal lips. Rather practical than doctrinal, this discourse nevertheless is pregnant throughout with deep, divine verities. Nowise controversial, it yet contains the solution of many a vexing dispute. Profoundly experimental, it searches the heart as He only can who knows its thoughts afar off. Pure and sincere, it brushes from the face of truth the gathered dust of centuries—the casuistries and quibbling traditions which had overlaid its holy beauty. Finally, it lays down, with high authoritative exposition, the fundamental laws of the new kingdom of God, afterwards supplemented by many a thoughtful parable, or expanded with fuller illustration; but the germs of almost all our Lord's teaching will, I think, be found here.

We have apparently two reports of it; this in St. Matthew, which is much the more full and detailed; another in St. Luke, chap. vi., which, however, contains

some sayings that are not found in the former. Some think they are really two different discourses, as that in St. Luke is said to have been spoken 'in the plain,' after coming down from the hill where he had ordained his apostles. They hold that Jesus delivered the substance of this sermon on two several occasions, and to different audiences, with varieties according to the character of his hearers. On the whole, I am disposed to adopt this view, and will therefore confine my observations mainly to the account given by Matthew. In the outset, however, let me show you what seems to be the general structure and drift of the Sermon. It is not, indeed, laid out in formal divisions, but flows naturally and easily along, without the stiff restraint of definite heads and particulars. Our Lord does not tell off his thoughts, or marshal his sentences in that way, as the custom is with us. But you are not therefore to conclude that there is any want of clear order and definite purpose in his discourse, as if it consisted only of a number of loose ideas and unconnected texts strung together at random. For convenience' sake, the various books of the Bible have been mapped out in chapters and verses; and hence, unfortunately, they are seldom read as other books are, with the view of understanding each of them as a whole. As the proverb says 'some people cannot see the wood for the trees;' they cannot see the book for the verses; they are so taken up with isolated texts that the general tenor of the story, or epistle, or sermon is often altogether lost. It is like as if we had taken some noble edifice in pieces, and numbered all its parts

and fragments, and then were content to examine here a brick, and there a stone, without having any idea of the complete structure. I am anxious, therefore, in the outset, that you should get a definite conception of this sermon in its general meaning and unity; for it is one, and has one distinct object, with clear lines of thought, each filling its part in the great argument. Let me, then, try to explain what I have called the structure of this sermon. It consists,

I. Of an introduction, beginning at ver. 3 and ending with ver. 16 of the 5th chapter of St. Matthew. In this introduction Jesus pronounces a series of blessings, and exhorts his followers to serve themselves heirs to those beatitudes, and to let their 'light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' The peculiar characteristic of these opening sentences is, the kind of man whom Christ pronounces happy. But, in the first place, let me say that the question, Who is the truly happy man? or, How may we attain unto happiness? has almost always been placed in the forefront of every religious and philosophical system, as if happiness were the great object which we ought to pursue. The Lord therefore begins his discourse, much as other teachers would, by touching on this subject. But we should altogether mistake his meaning, if we therefore concluded that he regarded this as the chief aim and end of man. On the contrary, every word he says here plainly implies that the direct pursuit of happiness is not the way to attain it; that when we make it our main object, we are certain to lose it; and that

we must be, therefore, like men rowing a boat who are looking in one direction, and making for the very opposite. While then the Lord's purpose was to bring joy and blessedness to men, His was not a system of refined pursuit of pleasure, and I daresay his hearers were not a little startled by the strange prelude to his wondrous teaching. For if you were asked to say honestly who is the happy, altogether enviable man in your opinion, would you not at once picture to yourself, almost instinctively, a person who was rich, untroubled with sorrow, had abundance to eat and drink, had no enemies, and of whom everybody spoke well? Possibly you may have heard of people who had all these advantages, and who yet were hardly blessed; but for yourself, you probably think that, if you were in their position, you would be as happy as heart could desire. How strange then it must have sounded, how strangely it still rings in our ears, when we seriously think of it, to hear Jesus saying, 'Blessed are the poor! Blessed are they that mourn! Blessed are the meek! Blessed are they that hunger! Blessed are the merciful, the pure-hearted, the peacemakers, the persecuted! Blessed are ye when all men speak evil of you falsely!' A strange road surely to happiness, this! Nor does it materially alter the case to understand these expressions in a purely spiritual sense; for spiritual poverty and sorrow and hunger are no more pleasant than natural poverty and sorrow and hunger. Look at them as we may, these beatitudes are very startling; and so they were meant to be; for they are just a varied illustration of the profound paradox,

‘Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.’ So, deep and broad, and sweeping over the entire face of existing moral ideas, with almost utter obliteration of all their familiar features, these introductory beatitudes open up to us a new world of spiritual character and holy beauty and consequent joy, such as had not entered into the heart of man to conceive. They show us that happiness lies not in outward circumstances, but in inward life. But they do more than that. They present us also with a spiritual character of a type altogether different from that which the wisdom of the world had exalted and glorified—a man poor in his own estimation, hungering for something better, sorrowing for his shortcomings, meek, merciful, pure-hearted, and peaceful, who, in virtue of these, should be persecuted and evil spoken of. Yet, in virtue of these too, he should be as light to the world and salt to the earth, blessed and a blessing, leading others to glorify the Father who is in heaven. After this introduction then, we have,

II. The text or topic of the discourse, in verses 17, 18, and 19 : ‘Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.’ This appears to me to be the great leading principle discussed and illustrated in the remainder of the sermon. Christ did not come to destroy the law. Indeed, no true servant of God is ever sent merely on a work of destruction. He may have to pluck up and to pull down, but he has also to build and to plant. Hence, the sceptic

who casts over all beliefs a pale shadow of doubt, and the discontented who only grumble at everything as wrong, but can by no means show us how to put them right,—these and all other merely destructive forces, though God may use them to work out his high design, are not properly his servants, for *their* mission is not to destroy, but to fulfil. Least of all could any son of God be sent on an errand to abolish any law of God. For his law is like himself, immutable. Its form, indeed, may change, and has changed; or it may have been for a season only partially revealed, and when the fitting time comes, it may be discovered in a full-orbed glory which does away with the former and imperfect utterance of it. Or, again, in the course of ages, human error may have gathered round and obscured it, or the dust of old tradition, and cobwebs of subtle casuistry may have concealed its clear and holy beauty; and it may, of course, form an essential part of the business of God's faithful servants to sweep away all such undated rubbish of neglectful years. For though there be some men who will have the form to be as eternal as the spirit, and who cannot see how the Lord has developed his truth, step by step, according as we were able to bear it; yea, and some also to whom the very dust and rubbish and cobwebs of Zion have a kind of sacredness, so that they tremble when they are being brushed away, as if the everlasting pillars and solid foundations were being unsettled; yet manifestly God's true prophet may be sent to alter the form of the law, and to enlarge and perfect the revelation of His will, and to remove all accretions of human error,

all the consecrated misunderstandings of the truth ; and still of such a workman we should not hesitate to say he has not come to destroy, but to fulfil. Moreover, properly speaking also, the servant of the Lord is not sent to proclaim mere novelties, newfangled systems, the product of his own restless brain or solitary thought, having no kind of paternity or affinity in the history of bygone ages. There is one purpose runs through all the course of Providence ; and he who is working the work of God must necessarily stand in direct contact with that scheme, not to thwart and baffle it, but to fulfil. Such a man who is a faithful prophet may indeed have much to say which is fresh, and even strange, to the minds of men. Nay, just in as far as he draws his inspiration direct from the fountain of light, he will not, he cannot, merely repeat old formulas, and ring the dull changes of weary commonplace. But, at the same time, underneath all that may be fresh and new and strange in his speech, you shall find, if you have eyes to see it, that in the deep heart of the new truth lies the old truth as a germ ; his gospel, whatever it be, is not an abolition, but a fulfilling of God's law. Bearing these things in mind then, we may apply them to the word of Jesus here, with some hope of attaining to a clear idea of its meaning, ' He came not to destroy, but to fulfil ' the law. And yet the apostle Paul, who verily had the mind of Christ, if ever man had, tells us that the law is now taken out of the way, and nailed to the cross. Nor does he, either directly or by implication, restrict that saying to the typical and ceremonial ordinances of the old cove-

nant ; it stands in all the breadth of its application, unlimited and absolute. How then are these statements to be reconciled ? Very easily, brethren, and without any antinomian wickedness whatsoever. For Jesus did come to change the form of the law, in order that its true spirit might shine forth with diviner glory and power ; and he came also to brush away from its holy beauty the long accumulations of base tradition and hateful sophistry, which custom had hallowed with a most mischievous consecration ; and, moreover, he came to take the veil from the face of Moses, and to reveal the will of God as it never was revealed before, so that what was glorious aforetime hath now no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth. For while the gospel of Jesus is not a mere novelty, but has its roots deep in the ancient law and testimony of Jehovah, yet it were doing high dishonour to the King and Author of our salvation, were we to narrow the new covenant by the antique limitations of Israelitish idea, or to read it by the glimmering taper of the custom and tradition of Zion. The oak is no doubt contained in the acorn ; but neither is the stately branching tree quite the same as the hard-shelled seed, neither is the acorn destroyed, but on the contrary, its very purpose is fulfilled, when it has developed into the umbrageous monarch of the woods. Even so doubtless the germs of all gospel idea may be found in the statutes and types of the old law of the Lord ; but that old law is no more the gospel than the acorn is an oak ; and if it be in one sense now abolished in Christ, it is only abolished because its purpose is accomplished, and its

promise fulfilled, and all of it that was truly divine and eternal absorbed into the more glorious scheme that has come in its room to abide for ever and ever.

III. Such being the great theme of this sermon, the rest of it appears to me intended to illustrate and enforce this statement. And, *1st*, He explains this principle by showing that the law must be kept not in the letter only, but in the spirit. Beginning at ver. 21, on to the end of the fifth chapter, we find a series of examples adduced to show how the commandments of God had been made of none effect, and along with these there is an authoritative exposition of what they really demanded. The Jewish scribes had elaborated with extraordinary ingenuity a very subtle casuistry, which really seemed as if it were meant to prove how thoroughly the spirit of the law might be outraged, while the letter was most sacredly, even superstitiously, esteemed. They found the commandment exceeding broad, and they managed to make it as narrow as suited their convenience. One might not kill his brother, but he was quite at liberty to hate him most cordially. One might not commit adultery, but lust was not forbidden; and with a simple writ of divorcement one might get rid of an inconvenient wife. One might not swear by the name of God, but if he wanted to swear, there were a number of handy oaths, about which he need have no scruple whatsoever. Above all, though one must not causelessly injure his neighbour, the principle of revenge was thought to be consecrated by the law which enjoined an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, so that he who

was bound to love his neighbour was equally bound to hate his enemy. For each of these ideas some fragment of the letter of the law might be pleaded, either directly or by seeming implication ; yet the spirit of it was thoroughly outraged by all their impious casuistry. I cannot, in this discourse, go into the details ; but what I would here ask you specially to note, is that Jesus does not merely lay down other and broader rules—directions which might also be violated by a literal observance in which the spirit was ignored. He does not merely clear up the laws which had been thus obscured, and so leave the matter to run the same course of deterioration as it had done before. But instead of a new set of formal regulations he gives us one great principle which is applicable to all circumstances, and which will be, if we follow it faithfully, a law-making power within us, a light shining upon our road, whatever that road may be. That great regulative principle is love,—love to brother, to wife, to neighbour, to enemy ; love which is truly the fulfilling of the law. The application of this to each of the cases adduced, though not in every instance equally manifest, will not be found difficult in any of them if you just bear this in mind, that the spirit of God's law is a spirit of love, and that, if in your inner heart you feel that any act, or word, or course of conduct, however sanctioned apparently by the letter, or enjoined by theological casuistry, is opposed to that love which you owe to your neighbour, then it is, and it must be, a violation of the law of the spirit of the new life which is in Christ Jesus. 'I say unto you, Love your enemies, that you

may be as the children of your Father which is in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good ; he sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust. Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.'

2. The *second* illustration of the great idea of this sermon is comprised in the first eighteen verses of the sixth chapter, and it is to the effect that God's law can only be fulfilled by utter sincerity and truthfulness. Deep-rooted in human nature is the spirit of ostentation, far more so than we are willing to allow. To do anything solely unto God, and without any view to the opinion and applause of men, that is by no means easy, as you will find when you try to enter into your closet, and pray to Him which seeth in secret. This is a common snare, which we have all daily and hourly to watch against. But the Pharisees of old made no attempt to resist it ; on the contrary, they organized and consecrated it, until religion had well-nigh become one vast systematized hypocrisy. If they gave a penny in alms, it was apparently done to the sound of trumpets before a crowd. If they prayed, it was at the street-corners, and in the market-places and chief resorts of the people, so that all might see how very pious they were. If they fasted, they disfigured their faces and clothes, that nobody might be ignorant how deep was their self-denial. So they won for themselves a kind of superfine religious character, which they turned to various profitable uses, and under covert of it they gave themselves to enjoy the indemnity of a secret and

impious indulgence : seeming to fulfil the law, they foully violated it ; having a form of godliness, they denied the power thereof. Against them, therefore, and the spirit that was in them, Jesus launched his most unsparing invectives. To other, commonplace sinners he was tender and compassionate. But this was a kind of iniquity utterly hateful to him. Again and again he cried woe on the Pharisees and hypocrites, who clothed their iniquity with the flowing robes and ostentatious phylacteries of piety. And oh, brethren, let us also take heed lest these woes come down in all their sad, sorrowful indignation on our heads. The Pharisee is not dead, though his name be in bad repute. His spirit is still abroad ; and hollow and base as it is, it is more congenial to a deceitful heart than the deceitful heart is at all willing to allow. Out upon all kinds of pretentious piety ! Sincerity, pure-hearted, open-souled sincerity, without veil, or gloss, or pretension of any kind,—that alone can fulfil the law of the Lord. I do not say that sincerity is everything, for no doubt a man may be sincerely in the wrong. But I do say, that nothing is right, or even in the way of being right, without this frank and clear-eyed sincerity ; no creed, no prayer, no fasting, no almsgiving, is of more worth than empty breath, if it be only in appearance, not in sincerity and truth. Yea, I will go farther, and say that whatever is done in an earnest, honest way, as unto God, and not unto man, hath in it so far a quality which greatly excels all the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and the Father which seeth in secret, sees, under all

possible folds of its error and mistake, a spiritual truthfulness infinitely preferable to the elaborate pieties of a hollow and pretentious formalism. Be ye therefore true, for your Father in heaven is true.

3. But yet, further, the theme of this sermon is enforced in a series of warnings and illustrations directed specially against a worldly spirit, and enjoining a practical faith in God; and this third part occupies the remainder of the sixth chapter from ver. 19 to the end. In this division there seems to be pretty clear reference to the Sadducee spirit, which was material and earthly; in short, it was simple worldliness philosophized into religion. The Sadducee did not think that there was any soul, or any resurrection, or anything, in fact, but what one could touch, taste, and handle. Holding life therefore to be no more than meat, and the body no more than raiment, of course the chief end of man was to provide for these. His system had no room for any cares but the cares of this world. Naturally, then, an unspiritual people fell largely into his way of thinking; and even when they did not quite accept his creed, they practically lived according to his law. 'What shall we eat, what shall we drink, wherewithal shall we be clothed?'—that formed, and still forms, everywhere and always, the great concern of multitudes of human beings. They may not deny the existence of a God, a soul, a judgment, and an eternity, but they go on as if they were no concern of theirs. To meet this secular spirit, then, Jesus calls here on his followers to lay up treasures in heaven, to have no care for to-morrow, but to trust their

heavenly Father, and to seek first, and above all other things, the kingdom of God and his righteousness, believing that all other things needful will be added therewith. He sets before them their higher spiritual nature and eternal destiny, as the chief, and infinitely the most urgent concern. He asserts the real dignity of man as being created in the spirit of God, whose life, therefore, ought to be a walk of faith in God. Sadducean and Gentile worldliness he condemns as alike dishonouring and degrading; and he calls us to trust in the heavenly Father, who knoweth what things we have need of, and is, even more than our earthly fathers, willing to give them.¹ This third part therefore implies that God's law is only fulfilled when we yield a chief place and importance, not to things seen and temporal, but to things unseen and eternal, and when we walk accordingly not by sight, but by faith. The lilies are clothed with glory more than Solomon's, yet they toil not, neither do they spin. The birds do not reap nor gather into barns, yet their heavenly Father careth for them. Take no thought then for to-morrow; seek the kingdom of God, and trust in Him; ye are of more value than many sparrows; and your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of those things.

4. The last illustration of the way in which the law is to be fulfilled is finely expressed in chap. vii. 12: 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do

¹ There is a reference here to vers. 7-11 of chap. vii., which, for reasons to be afterwards stated, belong, I think, properly to this third part, and have been somehow misplaced.

ye even so to them.' This is the great law of sympathy, without which we cannot do the will of our Father in heaven. It is exemplified in the previous part of the chapter under two forms. Thus, some people are ever ready to judge their neighbours,—ready to see their faults, ready to impute wrong motives to them; and to such persons Jesus says, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you even so to them.' Again, there are people who give that which is holy unto dogs, and cast their pearls before swine,—people who have no delicacies and no tendernesses, but who drag, perhaps without thinking of it, the most sacred things before those who are utterly unfit to deal with them. You would not like your own more private and personal affairs so dealt with; and 'whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.' We are to put ourselves, in short, into the position of our neighbour, and try to see how our conduct would then look; how we should like to be judged as we are ever ready to judge; and how we should feel if our holy things were profaned, as we sometimes profane that which is most sacred. And only when we bring this moral sympathy to bear on our conduct for its right direction, are we in the way of accomplishing the will of our heavenly Father.

Such are the four great illustrations of the theme, 'I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.' The law is to be fulfilled in the spirit by love, by sincerity,

by faith, by sympathy,—by doing in short to others as ye would that they also should do unto you. These are the guiding principles of the new life in Christ. They are not mere rules and regulations. They do not simply enjoin this, and forbid that. But they implant in the soul itself the light of a new life, by which it may direct its own steps in whatever position it may be placed. To receive this law, then, is to enter the strait gate; to walk by this light, is to travel the narrow road that leadeth unto life. Others had made the path broad and easy and flowery, requiring neither thought, nor consideration, nor self-denial; but Jesus was a true prophet, not coming in sheep's clothing to deceive, but speaking the very truth of God. Therefore he would have them to beware of false prophets and false gospels, easy and pleasant for the carnal man who shrank from the cross which His followers must bear. Therefore also in conclusion he would have them to remember that it was not enough to be hearers of the word, they must be doers of it also. It was not enough to make fine professions; they must bear fruit too. It was not enough to call him Lord, they must also do the works of his Father in heaven. Christianity is not a mere philosophy of religion; it is a true and holy life. It is not simply correct ideas, but manful, faithful, self-denying practice. And it is a strait gate and a narrow road, just because it is a life of love and truth and faith and sympathy. And so he concludes the sermon with a noble and solemn peroration,—
' Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine,

and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock ; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell not : for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon sand ; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell : and great was the fall of it.'

These are the great laws of the kingdom of God ; and thus it was that Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. It does not fall properly within the scope of this sermon to exhibit the process, the scheme of divine grace and wisdom, by which man's alienated nature is to be brought under subjection to these laws. The meaning and influence of the Cross therefore do not appear in it, except here and there in the most indirect and incidental way. But of course the great work of redeeming love is assumed, and lies at the root of the whole sermon, because there is no true obedience but what has its life in the death of Jesus. That underlies the entire idea of Christian ethics. But that being assumed, then to love our neighbour, be he friend or enemy ; to be honest, sincere, and true in the sight of God and man ; to walk by faith, not by sight, seeking first the kingdom of God, and trusting his fatherly care to provide for all our need ; and, finally, to do unto others as we would they should do unto us ;—so to live is to fulfil the law ; so not to live is to

dishonour and outrage it. And this, brethren, is the high design for which Jesus came and suffered and died, even that he might plant in our bosom, as there was in his own, a spirit of love and truth and faith and sympathy,—a divine and inspiring power by which we might be enabled to do the will of our Father in heaven. This only is salvation, brethren; this is the true reconciliation with God; even the taking away of the enmity of our hearts, and their deceitfulness, and their unbelief, to make us one with Christ as he is one with the Father. For this the babe was born in Bethlehem; for this the cross was reared on Calvary; for this He was a man of sorrows; for this He poured out his soul unto death; even that we might through grace obtain the same mind which was in him, and be able like him to do, and delight in doing, the will of our Father in heaven.

II.

INTRODUCTORY BEATITUDES.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad ; for great is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.'—MATT. v. 3-12.

IN these introductory beatitudes, Jesus sounds a few startling notes by way of prelude to the high theme of his discourse. And like the prelude of the cunning musician, who seems just to run his fingers carelessly over the strings, though in reality he touches all the chief chords of the harmony which by and by he will disclose in a more measured and beautiful strain ; so is it with these singular blessings with which the Son of Blessing commences his more public preaching. At first sight they appear like a series of unconnected and rather paradoxical sayings, yet in reality they touch on the deepest harmonies of spiritual life, and convey to

the thoughtful mind hints deeply significant, suggestions of all the truth afterwards unfolded in the more measured discourse. We should quite mistake if we treated these beatitudes, which dropped from his lips like honey from the comb, as if they were only a number of fine disjointed sayings. On the contrary, the same organic principle that pervades and gives orderly significance to the whole sermon, shapes also these introductory blessings. If the law of God is not to be destroyed, but fulfilled, this is the road by which we must travel towards its fulfilment. It is the poor in spirit, the mourner, the meek, and those who hunger after righteousness; it is the merciful, the pure-hearted, the peacemaker, and those who, for Christ's sake, endure persecution: these are the men who 'keep the statutes of the Lord with their whole heart and mind,' and to them accordingly belongs 'the blessing from on high, even from the God of their salvation.' Let it be clearly understood then, brethren, that these beatitudes are not a loose general introduction, scarcely if at all connected with the body of the discourse; for they really and most effectually prepare the way for the great theme of this sermon, by laying down the important truth that God's law is fulfilled not by outward actions merely, but by inward character; not by doing certain things, but by being a certain kind of man; not by formal service, but by the living spirit. This is the most important general characteristic of these sayings; and it runs through the whole sermon. Jesus does not say, Blessed is the man who says so many prayers

a day ; or, Blessed is the man who fasts so many times a week ; or, Blessed is the man who bestows so much of his goods on the poor. Were God's beatitudes promised to any particular acts, or even to any continuous performance of such acts, however disagreeable and against the grain, people would do them, and resolutely do them, in order to obtain so great a boon. But these blessings are ascribed, not to a particular class of actions, but to a particular kind of men ; not to mere performances, but to personal character ; and, moreover, that character is one of a very special and peculiar type, which in the fulness of its grace and beauty is only developed in us by the mighty working of God's Spirit.

Before entering on the details, there is yet one more remark I have to make. In St. Luke's account of this sermon, assuming it to refer to the same event, there are certain of these sayings which appear to rank in a different category from all the others, seeming to involve nothing whatever of a properly spiritual character. Thus he represents the Lord as saying merely, 'Blessed are the poor ;' 'Blessed are ye that hunger ;' 'Blessed are those that mourn ;' and again, 'Woe unto you rich ; unto you that are full ; unto you that laugh.' In various other places also he reminds his followers that it was a hard thing for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, and that, in fact, it was as easy for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Gathering together these various statements, some have drawn a picture of Jesus, in which he is represented as a kind of sublime demagogue, if I may so speak, flattering the

poor, and throwing contempt upon the rich, proclaiming a gospel which naturally 'the common people heard gladly,' and which just as naturally none of the rulers would believe; setting class against class, exalting the mean and bringing down the high to a level below those whom they were accustomed to despise. Now, if an ingenious writer, accustomed to draw literary portraits, but unfamiliar with profounder regions of thought, choose to ignore the deep spiritual idea of Christ's life and doctrines, he can easily piece together a number of texts which will form a plausible ground for describing Jesus as little other than a kind of French prophet of liberty, equality, and fraternity. It would be a very shallow picture, essentially untrue, nay, blasphemous; but it might be supported by rather a formidable array of passages. But the real spirit of our Lord's gospel is utterly alien from this. Christ belongs to no class,—his sympathies are broad as our common humanity, and embrace all men alike, with a fine understanding of every man's trial, and a readiness to help every one in his need. If he blessed the poor, and if he said it was hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, we have only to remember what was the state of opinion and feeling on this head at that time, in order to understand how his words assumed that form. For something of the Gentile spirit had crept in among the Jews, 'holding the faith of God with respect of persons.' Among the Gentiles, their kings and heroes were called the sons and favourites of the gods, and enjoyed a peculiar title to the divine

regard. But the mass of the common people were viewed as if they were little better than the beasts that perish. God belonged to the higher castes; and if there was an immortality it was reserved for them. A good deal of this spirit had percolated also into the heart of Israel; and now the Lord came proclaiming that the rich, instead of having any peculiar facility for attaining the divine blessing, were in reality subject to more than ordinary disadvantages in this respect. Not that God was anywise reluctant to be gracious to them, but that the deceitfulness of riches formed a strong temptation which it was hard for them to overcome. On the other hand, He also announced to the poor that the kingdom of God was come nigh unto them, that the gate of life was as open and as free to them as to any, that all the barriers and disabilities which men had erected were removed, and that the heavenly Father opened his arms wide to receive the humblest of his children. Thus he might well say, 'Blessed are ye poor, for now yours is the kingdom of heaven.'

I am persuaded, however, that these beatitudes, in as far as they form an integral part of the Sermon on the Mount, do not refer, or only refer in the most incidental way, to those who are socially poor: but, as St. Matthew expresses it, to those who are poor in spirit. Let us now then glance at these remarkable sayings in detail; and

1. The first of them pronounces a blessing on those who are poor in spirit. Let the limitation, the 'in spirit,' be carefully borne in mind. Poverty itself is

not a blessing, nor does it always inherit a blessing. The poor man's house may be tenanted by drunkenness or uncleanness, envy or covetousness, just as much as the rich. All are not blessed who wear the rags of Lazarus, any more than all are cursed who sit with Dives 'in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day.' On the other hand, let us not confound our Lord's expression 'poor in spirit' with the word *poor-spirited*, which looks very like it. There are people, not without considerable pretensions to religion also, who have nothing manly, generous, or noble about them, but are chiefly notable for a little and mean and cowardly character; and these are poor-spirited, but they are not poor in spirit. Those of whom our Lord speaks here are those men who, having learnt what the true riches are, feel themselves in consequence to be poor,—poor in wisdom, poor in faith, poor in love, poor in all that which the soul most needs, poor in those imperishable treasures which neither rust can corrupt, nor thief can steal. Now, he who thus feels his need is not far from the kingdom of God. O blessed poverty! it is heir to great riches. All the treasures of divine grace shall belong to it; for there is nothing keeps a man so poor as the conceit that he is rich, and has need of nothing. Let him be emptied of self, and then shall he receive out of the fulness of Christ.

2. The Lord blesses those that mourn. Again let me say that sorrow, no more than poverty, is a blessed thing in itself. God made laughter as well as tears;

and grief is no more divine than gladness. There are who mourn with a fretful, impatient murmuring against God, and there is no blessing in that cup; there are who mourn with a gloomy and impious despair, and surely there is no blessing in such grief. There is a sorrow that never lifts up its tearful eye to the God of hope and of all consolation, nor breathes a prayer to Him who binds up the broken-hearted; and it were hard truly to find a blessing there. Grief indeed is a favourite servant of God, going oftener on errands of his mercy than any other minister, and carrying balm and myrrh in the folds of its sad raiment. But then the grief, like the poverty, must be of a godly sort ere it profit much. If not in its first motions spiritual, it must at any rate deepen into such a spiritual sorrow—a mourning for sin, for the heart's estrangement from God, for the deadness and coldness of its better affections, for the leanness and poverty of its spiritual life. Let that be its character; let the soul cry out 'Woe is me! for I am undone;' and then verily better is the house of mourning than the house of mirth. That is a blessed sorrow,—and it shall be comforted. There's many a joyous house in which one could weep tears of blood. Blessed be God, there are also homes of mourning in which the angels sing; for theirs is the blessing and the consolation of God.

3. The meek are blessed. The meek are those who go through the world in a gentle, unobtrusive way, without forward self-assertion. A man who feels his spiritual poverty, and sorrows for it, will naturally be

meek ; for he will say, 'Who am I that I should resist wrong? There is no wrong I get, but what is less than I deserve.' Thus he does not make a great stand for his rights, nor yet a great to-do about his wrongs. He does not clamour for place and privilege and power and honour ; and even when injured, he is dumb, opening not his mouth. He does not strive nor cry, neither is his voice heard in the streets. The men of the world say, 'If we put up with injuries we shall be injured more and more ;' but the meek rather say, 'Let us not pay evil with evil, but overcome evil with good.' So they pretend to nothing, they assume nothing, they assert nothing for themselves, for they are poor in spirit ; and being meek and patient, they are blessed of the Lord. They shall inherit the earth ; they do not claim their share in it, and on that very account it shall be given to them ; they give up their right to all things, and therefore verily all things are theirs richly to enjoy. 'Blessed are the meek ; for they shall inherit the earth.'

4. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be blessed. Let a man be conscious of his spiritual poverty, and sorrowing because of it, and meekly enduring worldly injury and loss, and if you look into his heart you shall find that such a man has a great divine hunger in him—a yearning, craving, longing for righteousness. The felt want quickens a sacred desire. O happy he ! But how few there be that thirst for righteousness as the hart panteth for the water-brooks in the wilderness ! Many are content with the

righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. Some are satisfied because they are as good as their neighbours. Not a few are quite comfortable, because they are better than some others that they know. But God's blessing is not for those who are satisfied, but for those who are thirsty, and whose thirst is for absolute righteousness. O to be holy as God is holy! O to be perfect, as the Father who is in heaven is perfect! O to be free from every badge of guilt! O to be cleansed from every stain of sin! O to be numbered among those in whom the Righteous One seeth no iniquity at all! So they long for righteousness; not to be contented with anything less; ever reaching forth, ever 'pressing on to the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' Blessed verily is that man, for he shall be satisfied. His longing shall find peace in Jesus Christ the righteous. He shall drink of the living water, and never thirst again; 'for it shall be in him a well of water flowing into everlasting life.' I say not that the thirst shall be removed, rather it will be quickened; yet ever more as it is quickened, it shall also be satisfied in Christ, until, in the fulness of His Godhead, the man shall at last find the fulness of his own soul.

5. The merciful are blessed. Mercy is twofold. We call it pity when it has compassion on those who are merely suffering; we call it mercy when it extends forgiveness to those who have done us wrong. The meek man endures an injury; the merciful man forgives it. The pitiful man shows mercy to those who are distressed;

the merciful man has pity for his worst enemy. Our blessed Lord and Master was meek, for 'when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.' He was also full of pity, for 'He had compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way.' But his most glorious character was the mercy which sought out his very enemies that they might not perish. This is the most godlike work then in which a man can be occupied. All God's universe is beaming with mercy. True, there are strange, dark providences every now and then, and great wailings of sorrow borne from the stormy seas and from desolate homes. Yet the mass of God's dealings are full of stranger mercies, as any one may see who only considers the way by which he has been led; and as every one should see who only considers God's unspeakable gift, which is the emblem of his character, and the pledge of all blessing to the world. Blessed then are the merciful, for they are like God. How shall we ask mercy for ourselves, if we do not show it to others? How shall we pray, 'Forgive us our debts,' if we cannot also add, 'as we forgive our debtors'? 'Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.' 'Put on, beloved, bowels of mercy, gentleness, meekness, forbearing one another, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.'

6. The pure in heart are blessed. By this it is not meant to indicate men who are altogether sinless; for in that case, few as there may be now to inherit this

blessing, they would be fewer still, or rather there would be none at all. But in our Lord's day there were men who were contented with external and ceremonial cleansings. They were scrupulous about the washing of cups and platters, hands and vestments ; and meanwhile they were but whited sepulchres, the inner soul of them being utterly defiled. And in our own times there are people very like them—people who are nice and delicate and sensitive about all kinds of outward proprieties, strictly correct and blameless as regards these, who, nevertheless, take no care to have a clean heart. Now, for such men there is no blessing, but only for the pure in heart. And the pure in heart are they who seek spiritual cleansing, who would purge out every evil thought, and all the leaven of unrighteousness ; for Christianity not only calls us to a warfare with sin, but it promises a triumph over sin, even grace and strength to tread out the embers of unholy desire, and to restore to us perfect purity of heart. This is the only real purity. Vain is it to cleanse the stream if the fountain remained defiled. Fountain of all evil ! Bitter fountain of all sorrow ! O Lord, create a clean heart in us, for we cannot see Thee aright, or know Thee aright, unless the sin which now blinds the eyes of our understanding is wholly purged away. Give us the blessing of the pure heart, that so we may see Thee.

7. The peacemaker is blessed. Very beautiful surely is the office of the peacemaker ; well befitting the man whose God is a God of peace, whose Saviour is the Prince of Peace, whose hope is in the gospel of peace,

whose joy is, that the very peace of God keeps his heart and soul. No doubt, there may be a false peace; and there is, of course, no blessing for him who cries Peace, peace! when there is no peace. No doubt, it is said, 'First purity, then peace;' but that means purity of heart, not merely of doctrine, as it is commonly read; for certainly the apostle refers to our Lord's word here. Let us not neglect then 'to practise those things which make for peace,' and, 'as much as in us lieth, to live peaceably with all men.' Surely, long enough have the peace-breakers troubled the world with their brawls, and distracted the Church with their hatreds, seizing on every occasion to rend the seamless robe of Christ,—seamless, alas! no longer, but rather a garment of shreds and patches. Who, brethren, will believe that we are sons of God, if we are not striving to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? To heal divisions, to reconcile discords, to remove misunderstandings, that befits the men who have one God, one Saviour, one baptism, one home in which they hope to spend an eternity together. Verily, blessed is the peacemaker,—the man who will be a Christian and not a mere sectary; and he shall be called one of the sons of God.

Finally, the persecuted are blessed,—those who are evil spoken of and evil entreated for Christ's sake,—those men who, in dark and evil days, have grace and courage given them to uphold the truth, to stand by the right, to carry the banner of salvation aloft, to count their own lives not dear unto them, to resist

unto blood, striving against sin; blessed, indeed, are they to whom it is granted not only to speak for Christ, but also to suffer for his sake. This is the heroic Christian, who truly loves the praises of God more than those of men, and will rather suffer affliction with the children of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Verily, blessed is he. The world hates him, but the world is not worthy of him. The world speaks evil of him, but the world said his master had a devil. But he that confesseth Christ before men, him also will He confess before his Father which is in heaven. Blessed are ye, when all men shall speak evil of you falsely for my name's sake! Ah! how few covet that beatitude. We shrink from it; we are afraid of it with a most coward terror; we praise martyrs and confessors in the old times, who gave their bodies to be burnt; yet our own convictions are so feeble, that we cannot face a little abuse from the world, *i.e.*, the Pharisee world, which is ever most ready to say, Thou blasphemest, and hast a devil. May God deliver us from this weak fear. God grant us grace, when men speak evil of us falsely for his name's sake, to rejoice and be exceeding glad; for it were a sad thing to be praised by them who so persecuted the prophets that were before us.

Such, brethren, is the character of the man on whom the Lord Jesus pours out these rich beatitudes. If I had time, I might show you that the blessings he promises to each have a singular fitness, springing as it were out of the man's character, or else being in some way so closely related to it, as to be the best and most

natural reward he could obtain. A little study of each case will show you that this is true; that there is an admirable propriety in the special promise given to each of those whom Jesus here blesses.¹ But what I would like you to note specially ere we close is, that these beatitudes are not properly pronounced over a variety of persons, each of them different from the other, but rather over a certain character, whose spiritual development and special attributes are here outlined in no uncertain way, and at every stage crowned with a peculiar blessing. Certainly, we might take each one of the characters sketched so briefly yet faithfully in these weighty sayings, and freely proclaim to him that Christ's blessing is his. That is unquestionable. Given any one who is spiritually poor, or filled with godly sorrow, or meek, or hungering for righteousness, or merciful, or pure in heart, or peace-making, or persecuted for righteousness' sake; and to that man we might justly offer the gracious promises which Christ here proclaims. But I think we should miss the deep meaning of these words if we looked at them chiefly in that light. It is not different men, but different stages and characteristics of the divine life, which seem here to be blessed. Do not suppose that I would fix and formulate religious progress in so rigid a way as to insist that it must always go, step by step, after the pattern here laid down. I would be very far from doing that, for that would be to stiffen the living word

¹ I had previously lectured on the Beatitudes in detail; and this must account for the somewhat slipshod way in which they are treated here.

in a way which is not consistent with the living fact. But yet, may I not say, in a general way, that true religion commonly begins with a feeling of spiritual poverty, a sense of the utter want and destitution of the soul? And is not that followed ere long, or accompanied, by more or less of godly sorrow, mourning for the sin and leanness of our life? Such a state of mind will naturally ripen into meekness which is dumb before the Lord, opening not the mouth; and in the meek and lowly heart you shall commonly find the deepest instinct craving after righteousness. He who thus feels his need of mercy will be the man to show mercy to others. He who hungers after righteousness must needs seek the pure heart; he who mourns for his own estrangement from God will surely make peace; and the meek man who seeks nothing of this world is the man, I think, to endure persecution bravely. Thus it seems to me that the spiritual life is ordinarily developed, not indeed rigidly step by step, yet in some such process of gradual unfolding; and thus all the blessings of Jesus here properly belong to one man, as he attains to the various stages of divine grace. May I add, in conclusion, that this may help us to determine whereabouts we are, or if we have begun the life of blessing at all? An observing naturalist once made for himself a dial and a clock, to tell him the hours of the day, by means of the flowers which at certain intervals opened their petals to the sun. One wakened up at the faint, dim sunrise; another showed its blossom only some hours after, when the light was well diffused; a third

kept close till the full blaze of noon; and so on, all through the hours of the day. And may we not in like manner estimate, to some extent, the progress of the divine life in our souls, by the gradual unfolding of these various graces; beginning with the sense of our spiritual poverty, and crowned at last with that strong joy which rejoices in being 'counted worthy, not only to speak, but also to suffer, for Christ'? At any rate, be that as it may, it seems to me quite certain, that these beatitudes refer not so much to different kinds of men as to one man, each feature of whose character is here crowned with a blessing. Such, in fact, is the true idea of the Christian. The saint of the Jewish Church in those days was the Pharisee, self-complacent, haughty, cultivating the righteousness which is by the law, and highly satisfied with its formal observances, much given to ceremonial purifications, but not generally careful to obtain the pure heart, coveting the praise of men, and by all means avoiding persecution for any cause whatever. The hero of the Gentile world, on the other hand, was commonly proud, unmerciful, given to strife, not altogether destitute of noble and generous qualities, yet nowise cultivating the pure and holy graces of a true spiritual life. Very different from either of these is the man whom Christ here blesses; more different even from the Pharisaic saint than from the ethnic hero. He is one who is conscious of his spiritual want; who mourns his sin and shortcoming; who is meek and lowly in heart; who hungers and thirsts for perfection; who, because he needs mercy, is

himself merciful ; who is purifying his heart by faith ; who seeketh those things that make for peace ; and who will be found steadfast and enduring amid the evil-speaking and persecution of the world. All of these graces we may not be able to find in every Christian ; for alas ! we are not so careful as we should be to attain the fulness of the perfect man. But these are the characteristic features of the true man of God, and such is the man who will not destroy, but fulfil the holy law. Through the faith of Christ alone is such a holy and exalted spirit attainable ; yea, it had not even entered into the heart of man to conceive it until it was revealed by Jesus. Therefore let us draw nigh to Him in love, and beholding this glory as in a glass, let us pray and strive with all our heart to be changed into this image, from glory to glory, by the good Spirit of the Lord.

III.

INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

'Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'

—MATT. v. 13-16.

IT is often quietly taken for granted that the great object for which men live is to obtain happiness. They may choose the wrong road for securing this end; they may fall into mistakes, calling that blessedness which is not really so; or they may drop the future out of their calculation, and seek present enjoyment at the cost of their eternal well-being. But still it is assumed that the end of all their thinking and all their striving, is to obtain happiness; and, moreover, this is generally esteemed quite right and proper, provided only they seek the right kind of it, and in the right way. That is the key-note of the wisdom of this world; and at first sight you might suppose that this Sermon on the Mount started exactly from the same point, and that these beatitudes with which it begins are just an answer to

the question of all human hearts, How shall we attain to happiness? But it would be quite a mistaken idea to suppose that Jesus would have us to seek this as our chief end. He does promise blessing and joy here to the poor and the mourner and the meek and the hungry and the merciful and the peacemaker and the pure-hearted and the persecuted: and so far he does certainly reply to the question we are all too ready to ask. But he is very far from saying that the pursuit of happiness should be the great object of our life, even looking at happiness in its highest and most spiritual view. It is duty, not pleasure, which he ever sets before us. It is moral character, not comfort, which he presses on our most serious consideration. It is God, and not ourselves, that he exalts into this pre-eminence. Real happiness, indeed, will be the inevitable result of our living for Him. God's glory certainly coincides with our well-being. But that object is kept in such entire subordination to the high moral and spiritual end of our living, that just in proportion as we are putting it out of view, do we really attain it, and when we make it our chief pursuit, we are certain to lose it. Man's chief end is not to secure his own happiness. Man's chief end is to glorify God. But, at the same time, the man who will glorify God shall go from blessing to blessing, and from glory to glory, rejoicing with joy exceedingly even amid his poverty and sorrow and tribulation.

I do not know how far Christ may have intended to run a parallel between His own teaching and that of

other men, so as to bring out both their differences and their agreements. But both in the beatitudes, and in the passage we have this day to consider, he does seem to lay His doctrine quietly alongside of theirs, and to show, without any unnecessary antagonism, how near the truth and error lay to each other, and by what almost insensible gradations the one might shade into the other. For, in the first part of this introduction, He assuredly calls us to seek goodness rather than happiness, yet at the same time He promises to the really good man the highest beatitudes of His kingdom and glory ; therein confronting, on the one hand, those teachers who would have pleasure to be the grand object of life, and, on the other hand, those doctors who taught that any hope of reward took all the virtue out of our good behaviour. And now, in the verses we have read to-day, he further presents his gospel as being equally opposed to, and yet having equal affinities with, two other kinds of opinion. First, there was in Judea a sect called Essenes, never referred to in the Gospel directly by name, yet to some extent moulding our Lord's utterance of truth. They were a sort of monks and hermits, retiring from the world to care for their own souls, cultivating, it is thought, rather a spiritual life, but doing little or nothing for the moral well-being of general society. Light they may have had ; but whatever light they had was hid under a bushel. Then there were Scribes and Pharisees, sounding trumpets before all their good works that they might be seen of men ; concerning whom we shall have more to say by and by. Now, if there is

anything utterly repugnant to the spirit of the gospel, it is this Pharisaic ostentation. As we read this sermon, we shall find it at once most searchingly and scathingly rebuked. Christ's people are certainly not to be like them. Instead of doing his works to be seen of men, the Christian, when he fasts, is to anoint his head with oil, and wear a cheerful look; when he prays, he is to go into his closet and shut the door; when he gives alms, he is not to let the left hand know what the right hand doeth. All is to be done 'as to the Father which seeth in secret.' Yet, on the other hand, the monkish Essene spirit is as little the spirit of the Christian life as that of the ostentatious Pharisee. One must do all to the Father which seeth in secret, and yet he must be as salt to the earth. One must shut himself up in his closet, and yet he must not put his light under a bushel. One must whisper in secret that which shall nevertheless be proclaimed as from the housetop. Christianity is to be alike unostentatious and influential,—a hidden life in God, yet known and read of all men. And the only way of reconciling these different ideas, or even understanding how they can be reconciled, is just to remember that the moral character of any action lies, not in its outward form, but in its inward spirit; your fasting and praying and almsgiving may be, in fact, perfectly well known to the world around, and yet, in spirit, they may be all done only with a view to God and His will. There is danger, of course, that the external act, with its publication and credit among men, may ensnare your soul in the meshes of Pharisaic pretension, and thereby you

shall suffer loss ; but, on the other hand, there is also danger that the literal and absolute hiding of religious duty should lessen its influence for good, and thereby the world should suffer loss. And, therefore, the reconciliation of this difficulty seems to lie altogether in the proper regulation, not so much of our actions, as of their motives. Whatever belongs to the privacy of religious life, let it be done in secret, and yet so done in secret as if all eyes were on us. Whatever belongs to public observance of worship or mercy, let it be done in public, and yet so done in spirit as if none but God knew. The motive, then, is everything. If we seek glory of men, we have no glory with God ; yet our salt must not lose its savour, nor our light be put under a bushel ; for, in avoiding immoral display, we must also take heed not to lose moral influence. The hidden life may be largely public, and yet a hidden life nevertheless, because it lies in the spirit, in the motive, in the soul's relation to God.

Now, in the passage before us, this spiritual and public influence is presented under two aspects : the one under the similitude of salt, the other under the analogy of light.

I. Christians, such Christians as those to whom the beatitudes of the previous verses belong, are called to be, and will be, 'the salt of the earth,' and they are exhorted not to let 'the salt lose its savour.' I suppose there is reference here to the fact that the salt used in those countries was not the pure crystals which are prepared for us, and which cannot lose their peculiar

virtue, but the rock-salt, composed partly of saline particles, partly of earthy matter from which the salt might be washed away by the sun and the rains, in which case it was good for nothing but to be cast out as metal for the roads, and trodden under foot of men. You can easily see that such a compound substance might lose all its virtue; and when the earths and salts were separated, it would be comparatively useless. Now, obviously our Lord's purpose here is not to show that in like manner the elements of faith and spiritual power may be eliminated from the Christian soul so as to leave it of the earth, earthy. He is not speaking of that subject at all. But what he really refers to is the influence for good which all his people ought to be exercising; and in that view, he says virtually this: 'Ye ought to be, and, if ye are truly mine, ye are fitted to be, as salt to the earth, keeping it from corruption; and if ye are not exercising this influence, then are ye as unprofitable as salt which has lost its savour, and is only worthy to be trodden under foot of men.' And quite right that it should be trodden down, if it is not leavening, savouring the world.

Two things then seem to be involved in these words. 1st, Salt gives relish to what would otherwise be tasteless or unpleasant; and Christ's people are, if we may so speak, the relishing element in the world, which prevents it from being loathsome altogether to the Lord. So Lot was in the cities of the plain the one savour which made them even so long endurable. There was not much salt in Lot; but there was a little, there was

a righteous soul that at least vexed itself because of the unrighteousness around it, if it did not do very much to arrest that unrighteousness. And because of Lot, God almost spared the place, would have spared it had there been only a few more like him, or had he been just a little truer than he was. Even so Christians are to be as salt to the earth which, without them, would be in a manner loathsome, being so possessed with mean and base and ignoble souls. Have you not yourselves felt, now and then, when you thought of all the worldliness and vanity and covetousness and carnality and vice and crime and hypocrisy and lies, which swept like a foul deluge around, not without tainting your own heart, that really it was almost impossible to look on such a world without a kind of sickening despondency, half-contempt half-disgust, and a feeling like that of the Psalmist, when he said that verily the thoughts of man's heart are all evil, and that continually? But then, on the other hand, what a sense of relief it gives, and hopefulness, reconciling one to human nature again, to witness some act of noble heroism, or patient suffering, or true, loving sacrifice, or pious devotion and worth, in the midst of all the sad and evil elements of the time! That is the salt of the earth; and it is your part, if ye are the chosen of God, brethren, so to manifest the life of Christ, as to be thus an element of relish and reconciliation and hopefulness, amid the sins and errors of the world. But,

2dly, and specially, salt is a preserving agent, arresting the natural tendency to corruption. I suppose

the salt of the sea helps more or less to keep it from stagnant rottenness. At any rate, many substances which would otherwise decay are preserved, by means of this agent, from putrid and unprofitable waste. Now, such are the evil elements in our moral nature, that, left to itself, its tendency is ever to deteriorate and corrupt. The mental degradation of barbarism is always allied with an equal, or greater moral depravity. But the intellectual polish and refinement of civilisation are usually also combined with vices which eat out the core of its prosperity, and ere long bring it to ruin. Under all forms of life, therefore, those who are 'dead in trespasses and sins' exhibit this tendency to increased moral corruption; and there is nothing so effectual for arresting its progress as the presence and influence of living Christian men. I do not undervalue any other agencies. I do not say that sound knowledge, and high truth, and earnest thought, and faithful administration of justice, do not play a useful part in helping to preserve the world from ever-deepening degradation. But certainly there is no power so able to rebuke iniquity, and cover it with shame—no authority so weighty in favour of what is right and true and lovely, as that of a genuine Christian life, unobtrusively, yet steadfastly, aspiring after God. Of course, if a man sets himself up for an example, if he is always thinking that it is his business to act as salt to the earth, that very effort and consciousness will probably insinuate a leaven of the Pharisees into him, which will render all his good works unavailing. In order really to wield this happy influence over men,

one must live to the Father which seeth in secret, for more than half the power of the Christian life lies just in its entire simplicity as a life not for man, but for God. Its influence on others depends on its utter want of ostentation. But let it be what it ought to be, a meek and quiet spirit of godliness, and then how it sweetens domestic and regulates public conduct, and makes vice to be ashamed, and to hide its head, and is verily salt, everywhere checking the growing evils of the world !

Well, brethren, Christ's people are called to this duty; they are to be the salt of the earth ; let them take heed to fulfil their high calling. People we hear often sorrowfully complaining that the world is waxing worse and worse. Maybe it is ; maybe it is not. I have my own opinion about that. But if it is, let those who complain of it bethink them whether they are playing their part as salt to check this corruption. It would not decay if Christians were all that they should be. But what, if the salt have lost its savour ? What, if we are more given to deplore the ravages of evil than to exhibit the sweet influences of goodness ? What, if we are practically living just as the world lives, never feeling our spiritual poverty, nor sorrowing for our sin, nor hungering for better things, nor seeking the pure heart, nor bravely enduring the reproach and cross of Christ ? What then, brethren, is the worth of the salt which has lost its savour, and become of the earth, earthy ? Is it any wonder if men trample it under foot, and despise it ? Does not Jesus say that it is fit for nothing better ?

II. The second aspect under which this Christian

influence is presented here is, Believers are to be the *light of the world*. This figure carries the matter into a somewhat higher region. It expresses a power of a nobler kind than the former. Salt makes the world enduring, bad as it is. Salt also preserves it from becoming still worse. But light quickens life; light shows the way of God, and leads into it; light at once develops and exhibits all the beauty of earth; light helps us to fellowship one with another; light awakens the voice of adoration and praise. Without it the germs would lie dead in the cold earth; without it no one could walk the viewless road; without it no flowers would bloom into fragrant beauty; without it no companionship of men were enjoyed; and the song of birds is silent when no light shines. Now it is of course certain that Christ himself is properly the light of the world. It is He who revealeth all things; who clothes the world with holy beauties; who fills our souls with melodies of grace; who is the sun of righteousness, the light that enlighteneth every one that cometh into the world. Yet His people also, in virtue of the grace which he bestows on them, have a work to do in illuminating the world's darkness, and 'must let their light so shine, that men, seeing their good works, may glorify their Father which is in heaven.' They have to avoid ostentation, and yet they are not to put their candle under a bushel. They are to be careful against the pretentious display of the Pharisee; but they are also to see that the world is not deprived of the light and the help which God enables them to give. They

are to shine like the face of Moses, and yet of them, too, it must be true that they wist not it so shines. And there are two ways by which this object has to be achieved :—

1. The Christian must be a light-bearer. He who brings the lamp is not himself a light, yet he brings light; and every man of God has it laid on him to do something in this way,—‘Holding up the word of life in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.’ Brethren, if we have received the light, if we love the light, if it has guided us into peace, if we believe that this light is the life of men, we cannot surely conceal it from those who are perishing for lack of it? What, then, have we been doing for those who are still in darkness, ignorant of God and his Christ, lying in the shadow of death? Can we let them alone in their ignorance, alone in their unbelief, alone in their sin; warning no one, exhorting no one, comforting no one, instructing no one, but leaving them to grope and stumble through darkness unto death? And can we still hug the light to ourselves, and rejoice in it, and glory in its pure truth and help and gladness, though, all the while, multitudes around us, at our doors, under the shadow of our homes and churches, in lanes and alleys and streets crowded with immortal souls, are perishing for want of knowledge, dying without God? Brethren, bethink you seriously; Christ says to you, ‘Ye are the light of the world.’

2. It is implied here that Christians are to be light-givers as well as light-bearers. A candlestick holds the

light, but itself gives none. It were a poor thing to be a mere candlestick, bringing light, but being one's-self in darkness. Indeed, I question if the truth we teach will ever be spoken to much purpose, if we are not living it, as well as speaking it. To be a proper light-bearer, one must be also a true light-giver. For one soul saved by Christian precept, you shall find twenty saved by Christian example. The greatest sermon one can preach is the silent sermon of a true and pious life. The most heart-stirring eloquence is not that which is rounded off in voluble sentences, but that which is spoken by the still small voice of patient duty, and by the tender graces of a meek and lowly life. Nor is there anything which has done so much to keep the world in darkness as the contrast between the light which we bring and the darkness in which we too often live, the carnal-mindedness of those who profess to be spiritual-minded, the earthliness of those whose conversation should have been in heaven. Clearly understand the word of Jesus, then, to us here. It is not 'Ye must bring light to the world;' but 'Ye must be light to the world.' We must not only teach Christian theology, but exhibit Christian life. Infinitely greater than any power of eloquence, whatever earnestness or unction be in it, is the quiet outgoing of Christian daily life, the calm shining of meekness, patience, faith, truth, and love; and all that one could say in behalf of Christ, all the arguments, evidences, proofs of convincing reason, will accomplish far less for the persuasion of souls, for the lightening up of life's dark and troubled path, and for the glory of the

Father, than shall be done by the purity and simplicity and righteousness and kindness of your Christian walk and conversation. Now, bethink you, brethren, is your light thus shining among men? That light may be great or little, may hold a high and splendid place, as in the lighthouse gleaming through the storm and the darkness; or it may be obscure and unnoticed, as the lamp at the fireside round which the household only group, and are glad together. It may be a far-glancing radiance, profitable to those in peril, or a quiet flame, without anything to draw to it the observation and applause of the world. But is it really shining, in its own place and with its proper light, shining so that men understand Christ better by its means, and are led thereby to glorify the Father which is in heaven? There are lambs of the flock to be led to still waters and fresh pastures. There are stray sheep which have wandered from the fold, and which might be beacons back again to peace. There are mourners to be comforted, whose drooping faith it might be yours to revive. There are poor neglected ones who have to learn what is the true riches. There are sick-rooms in which ye might trim the watch-light as they go down the dark valley. Oh, many is the tender charity, many the work of faith, whereby you might earn to yourselves the blessing of him that is ready to perish! Have ye done so? Have ye tried to do so? Would your actual life be any comforting, quickening, cheering guide to such men? Was any thoughtless one ever arrested by your example? Was any wicked one ever rebuked by your conduct?

Was any inquirer ever guided by your path unto God? Was any disconsolate one ever revived by your peace and hope in Jesus? Did any little one ever learn from you where is the pure and sincere milk for his soul? Is there a spot in all the earth which, but for you, would have been darker and drearier than it is? Is there a soul in all the world that, seeing your good works, has been led to glorify the Father which is in heaven? Or what, if you have even been a source of darkness, and perplexity, and unbelief to your neighbour, hiding from him that 'life of Christ' which it was your business to 'manifest in your mortal bodies'?

Thus the people of Christ have to be lights to the world, first, as light-bearers teaching the truth, and then as light-givers practically illustrating the grace of Christ in their lives. And let me say to you, brethren, there is no witness which we can bear for Jesus, that will be found half so effectual as this. I would by no means undervalue the importance of solid argument and learning, or any other light which may lead us to the Lamb. But at all times, and more especially in a troubled, uneasy age like this, it seems to me of infinite moment to remember that there is not only a fine infection, as it were, in the example of practical piety, a kind of mysterious though blessed contagion, by which it diffuses itself through the world; but also that the living illustration of Christian faith is really the most powerful of all reasons for producing clear and stable convictions in the mind. By its fruits the truth is known quite as much as by its arguments. If the

world is to learn what the gospel is, it must be shown it not merely in a book, but in a life. And though I would again repeat that all ostentation of self is utterly repugnant to the spirit of Christianity, so that we should be only damaging the cause by setting ourselves up as examples; yet, on the other hand, ye by your meek endurance, by your patient kindness, by your gentle temper, by your cheerful piety, by your tender mercies, by your ample charity, by your pure love, by your self-sacrifice, by your truth and integrity and holiness, in all which He who walks amid the golden candlesticks is ever willing to minister to you sacred oil so that your lamps may shine,—by these means ye may be the true lights of this world, beaming along the whole path of life, and beaconing many a troubled soul on to its rest in God. This, surely, ye will be, if ye are the heirs of these beatitudes of Jesus. If ye are poor in spirit, if ye have godly sorrow, if ye are meek and lowly, if ye hunger after righteousness, if ye are merciful, if ye aim at heart-purity, if ye are peacemakers, and if, in the midst of evil-speaking and persecution, ye are ‘steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,’ then, verily, ye shall be a relishing and preserving salt to the earth, and a light which will lead men to glorify, not you, but your Father which is in heaven.

IV.

THEME OF THE DISCOURSE.

'Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.'—MATT. V. 17-19.

I HAVE ventured to call this the text, or great theme, which is discussed, with various illustrations, in the rest of the Lord's sermon. Holding so important a position, then, it will require, as from its inherent importance it is entitled to get, our very special attention; and this is more particularly needed at the present time, when many among us are so greatly troubled, or perplexed, or unsettled in their minds with regard to this very point. God grant that some of that trouble and unsettlement may be removed by a careful examination of this weighty saying!

And here let me say, at the outset, that the language of our Lord must be understood by the usage of the

Jews, and not by the ideas which we may attach to certain words. Now, by the phrase 'the law and the prophets,' they meant the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures; not the moral law and the prophetic books merely, but the whole of their sacred writings, embracing histories, laws of various kinds, psalms, books of wisdom, and prophecies; all those works, in short, which 'holy men of old wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' It is necessary to bear this in mind, because the words of Jesus here are often quoted as if they meant that one part of the law was still in force, while it is admitted that other parts of it are abolished. But beyond all doubt, what the Lord said, and what every one that heard him would understand him to say, was equivalent to this: 'I am not come to destroy the Scriptures, but to fulfil them. The whole law of God, not the Decalogue only, but the entire law, moral, ceremonial, and judicial, and every jot and tittle of the Old Testament Scriptures, must be fulfilled; and heaven and earth shall pass away sooner than any of them shall fail.' Let that be carefully borne in mind, brethren; for that is the real import of Christ's saying here. Many of those who heard him would, I daresay, have made no great objection, had He abolished some of the ten commandments, but they would have raised a loud clamour had He assailed any of those ordinances by which the Jews were specially denoted as God's covenant people. Many of those who now read his words think that He did come to annul those statutes which were Israel's peculiar treasure, but that He certainly

meant to confirm and perpetuate the Decalogue. But that which Jesus really said embraced equally all the law and the prophets, the entire sacred books of the Jews, Mosaic, Davidic, Solomonian, and prophetic, and every divine ordinance contained in them; and of one and all Jesus said, 'I am not come to destroy them, but to fulfil.' Brethren, there is no possible exposition of the passage which does not start with this as the only fair interpretation of our Lord's words. By the law and the prophets he meant, and could only mean, the entire Old Testament Scriptures.

Note yet further, before going on to discuss the statement thus broadly laid down, that there seems to have been an opinion current at this time that Christ did intend to introduce some changes into the law and worship of Jehovah. He must have been aware of this, and aware of the importance of removing any false impressions on the subject; and therefore he began by saying, 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' These words certainly imply that people had been so thinking, and that Jesus knew what was in their hearts, and that he was anxious to clear away an opinion which was tolerably certain to create a strong prejudice against his gospel. How that idea had arisen in men's minds, I do not know. He had, indeed, on his way from Jerusalem to Galilee, told the woman of Samaria that the day had come when the true worshipper was to worship the Father neither in Jerusalem, nor on Mount Gerizim; and that certainly looked very

like an abolition of the Temple and its peculiar consecration. Possibly also he who could thus boldly foretell to a hated Samaritan the destruction of all those limitations which girt, or seemed to gird, the devotions of men within the precincts of Zion, had uttered many other incidental sayings fitted to produce a feeling of uneasiness in the jealous minds of the Jews, and a strong suspicion that he contemplated some radical changes in regard to the statutes and testimonies of Israel. Obviously this opinion had got abroad some way or another, and as obviously Jesus wanted to counteract it; and yet I fancy it is even still more obvious that, in trying to counteract it, he must have strongly confirmed it, at least in the minds of many who were then listening to him.

For just consider a moment what the Lord proceeds to do after this large and decisive statement regarding the law and the prophets. It will be utterly impossible to get any clear understanding of the matter unless you pause here, and observe that Jesus, knowing what people thought, knowing how sharply suspicious they would be of any proposal to alter the minutest point of the law, and clearly anxious to remove any such distrust, and to produce a distinct conviction that he meant really to fulfil and establish all the law and the prophets; yet when he goes on to illustrate this position, he does, in point of fact, directly abrogate some commandments, and so interpret others that the people could scarcely have recognised the old law in its new light. I might, at this point, assuming the

entire unity and equal authority of the teachings of our Lord and his apostles, remind you that very many of the most cherished ordinances of Scripture, that is, of the law and the prophets, were abolished by Him, that is, in his name and by his spirit, a few years after. Paul, for example, cast off the bondage of circumcision. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews swept away the whole Aaronic priesthood and their sacred rites. Unquestionably many, and very serious changes were made in the law and the prophets by those who had the mind of Christ, and who were specially anointed by the Holy Ghost to reveal all the fulness of his gospel. But at present I pass these by, and will confine myself to what our Lord expressly says in illustration of the principle that he came not to destroy, but to fulfil them.¹

And now let me say that a law may be at once fulfilled, and also abrogated, and that this is the case in the present instance. A very simple illustration will explain what I mean here. You prepare some day a draft of your will and testament, giving an outline, more or less clearly, of your various desires and bequests. You do not mean it to be your real and final will, though, were death to overtake you in the meanwhile, it would need only your signature to be a valid legal document. All you design, however, by it is to give the necessary directions for those who are to draw up your last testament in such form and clearness as is necessary for so solemn a deed. In that second will, then, you will embrace all the substance

¹ *Vide Appendix.*

of the former. The directions may be clearer, the bequests may be larger, the reasons may be more explicit, and altogether the document may wear a very different aspect from the first rude sketch of your design. Still the whole purpose indicated in the earlier document may be contained, and even more completely expressed in the later one, so that in the strictest sense those who observe your last directions shall be accomplishing your previous will. It is fulfilled then, but at the same time it is annulled. I do not say it is useless. On the contrary, it may, if occasion require, be found in many ways serviceable, as explaining the terms of the real testament. But as the authoritative document it is set aside by the later and completer deed. Your trustees will administer under the second will. Your legatees will heir according to its provisions. And in all disputes which may arise, it will be recognised as the only valid and authoritative expression of your design. Thus a draft will, which if duly signed and witnessed would be a sufficient testament, is at once fulfilled and annulled by the later and final deed, and your trustees might quite honestly say, when carrying out the provisions of the latter, that they were not abolishing, but really accomplishing, the purpose outlined in the previous document.

Now, the Scriptures are divided into an Old Testament and a New Testament, and it was not without reason that they were so named. Of course the analogy suggested by that word may be stretched too far; and therefore we must be careful how we handle it. It is,

however, an apostolic illustration, and affords, I think, the only sufficient key to explain our Lord's language here. The law and the prophets, that is, the Old Testament Scriptures, contain, as it were, the draft and outline of the divine will with regard to his creatures. I do not speak of them merely as Jewish documents; for, though intrusted to them specially, they were the only revelation of God's purpose existing for many centuries, and all the world had an interest in them as well as the covenant people. They contained, then, a sketch or outline of the plan and purpose and law of God, but that sketch was avowedly imperfect, and contained many explicit intimations of a future and more perfect revelation of his will. Still, so long as that New Testament was not promulgated, the first imperfect deed remained as the one authoritative utterance of God's law to all men. It consisted of various documents,—historical, legislative, poetical, philosophical, and prophetic,—but all were embraced under the phrase, 'the law and the prophets,' and all were alike binding and authoritative up to the fulness of time, because all were stamped, as it were, with the seal and signature of the most high God. But now the period had arrived, indicated by the Old Testament itself, when the economy or dispensation which was administered according to its provisions, was to give place to another economy, for the ordering of which a New Testament was to be prepared. It is granted at once that, under very diverse forms, there was to be, and is, an essential unity in both these dispensations. It is fully

admitted that the divine will, imperfectly indicated in the one Testament, is embraced and far more clearly expressed in the other. There are changes indeed, some of them even affecting important moral principles,—for the first covenant was given to a people who were not prepared for the fulness of the truth, and therefore we are told that, because of the hardness of their hearts, God suffered some things which are no longer permitted. But it is essential to our argument that all the real principles of moral rectitude and spiritual truth contained in the Old Testament, are, with added clearness and completeness, carried forward into the New. The one is the draft or preparatory will, the other is the perfect and final deed, by which the former is at once thoroughly fulfilled and also for ever annulled.

I say the Old Testament Scriptures were fulfilled by Christ, not destroyed or dishonoured, even in the least of their commandments. He came to do the will of his Father, and to accomplish his promise; and even so He did, maintaining God's holy law in all its integrity, in all its spirituality, in all its eternal right, and in all its lofty supremacy. Were you to enter a room in the early morning where a company were sitting or drowsing, with sickly hue, by the dull glimmer of candles, which never had given a sufficient light, and were now guttering, neglected, and burning down to the socket, you would not think you were destroying the light by flinging open the casement, and letting in the clear sunshine upon them. You would, on the contrary, feel

that by this process only could they get the full light which they needed, though certainly the faint glimmer of their lamps would be lost in the full blaze of day. Now, much in the same way the Lord Jesus came into the world, and found there, as it were, the old seven-branched candlestick of the tabernacle still burning, though dim and low, for it was not well trimmed in those neglectful years; found there the old law of Moses, moral, ceremonial, and judicial, still recognised, though a good deal obscured by their traditions. But it was not his mission simply to revive it in its old purity, and to restore its ancient power. It was his purpose to bring from the same Father of Lights a kindred, but fuller and more glorious law, which should be to the ancient economy as the splendour of the morning sun is to the twinkling of the midnight lamp. So he fulfilled the ancient Scriptures, and in that very fact annulled them. We are no longer under their economy, but under the grace and truth which came by Christ Jesus. That New Testament contains in itself, and without mixture or addition from any other quarter whatever, the complete revelation of God's will for our salvation,—the whole truth we are to believe, the whole law we are to obey, the whole rites of divine worship, the entire covenant of our redemption. As the servants of Christ, we administer only its provisions. As the heirs of God, we get our inheritance only according to its appointment. It is the one supreme authoritative document for determining His purpose; and it holds this place of high and exclusive power just

because it has fulfilled, and in fulfilling has abrogated, the entire Old Testament dispensation.

I do not indeed say—you would utterly misunderstand me if you supposed me to mean—that those ancient Scriptures are now altogether useless. On the contrary, they remain, and ever shall remain, a most helpful commentary and illustration, profitable in a hundred ways for doctrine, and correction, and instruction, and reproof in righteousness. Their histories record many a cheering example of worth, and truth, and faith. Their laws, many of them, are such brief and weighty words as we could indeed ill afford to forget. Their psalms breathe some of the highest and purest aspirations of vital godliness. Their books of wisdom shed great masses of light on many of the dark problems which have in all ages perplexed the souls of men. And their prophetic writings are pregnant with righteousness, and glowing with ardent expectation, begotten of the Spirit of God. Were they by any strange chance to be lost to the world, that were a loss which could be paralleled only by the destruction of the new and better testament. Were they to be lost, we should most certainly lose the point and full meaning of many a gracious word both of Christ and his apostles. The Epistle to the Hebrews would become a dark and hopeless mystery almost from beginning to end, and the entire New Testament would lose its best and clearest and most faithful commentary. Instead of regarding the ancient Scriptures as mere obsolete, antiquated, useless documents, to be left to the moth and

the cobwebs, I hold that, rightly used, they are infinitely the best helps to our understanding of the doctrines of Christ. But while I thus regard the first draft of the will as of quite unspeakable value, I must again repeat that it is not now the legal and authoritative document under which I act as God's servant, or ye claim to be his heirs. The first deed is not partly set aside and partly obligatory, but all of it has been fulfilled, and all of it has been annulled. All of it that is eternal is embraced in the New Testament; and, therefore, that New Testament is now the one complete and sufficient will of God for our salvation: so that even, as I have said, were the ancient Scriptures, by some strange unhappy chance, to be lost,—though we should thereby, no doubt, lose not a little of the point and force of many a precious New Testament word,—yet we should still have the whole will of God, the perfect law of life, the complete scheme of grace, all of absolutely essential to the salvation of men.

In illustrating this general principle now, I select, in the first instance, one of its applications in regard to which all Christian men are agreed. For it is universally allowed that those rites and ceremonies of the Old Testament dispensation, which typified the coming Messiah, and were only of value as far as they shadowed Him forth to the faith of ancient Israel, are of course fulfilled and abolished in Him. This fact will, in itself, show that the general principle of this discourse is a sound one, viz., that some laws may be alike honoured

and put an end to, obeyed and abrogated. I suppose that there is no one here present competent to form an opinion on such a subject, who will not at once admit that what is called the ceremonial law was assuredly fulfilled in Jesus ; and that in its fulfilment it was certainly abolished. Limiting ourselves for the present then to that one point, it is sufficient to prove that some laws may be at once obeyed and abrogated. Hence, nobody can object to our general principle ; it is manifest ; it is undeniable ; the only question possible must relate to the detailed application of it in certain cases. We have no circumcision now ; not because the rite was dishonoured, but because in Christ there is a circumcision of the heart, a cutting away of the fleshly nature, which is the true sign of the better covenant. We have no passover lamb—because Christ our passover is slain for us. We have no day of atonement—because Christ is our atonement, having offered himself ‘through the eternal Spirit,’ that he might ‘purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.’ We have no consecrated priesthood—because Christ is the eternal High Priest, after the order of Melchisedec. And we have no local temple—because His people are built up on Him, lively stones, into a living temple, to offer spiritual sacrifices well-pleasing to God through Christ Jesus. Thus, these provisions of the Old Testament are at once fulfilled and abolished ; Christ is the end of all that law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Does he then make void these ordinances ? Nay, He establishes them ; for all the virtue of them lay

entirely in Him. This the Christian world now sees clearly. But it was not so always. It was not by any means clear to Peter and some other apostles ; and when Paul first proclaimed it, it was amid a storm of obloquy and misunderstanding and bitterness and reproach. And if inspired apostles were at first slow to receive this part of the truth, ought not we to exercise forbearance and charity, and even to think it possible we may be mistaken, when many faithful servants of Christ, and painstaking students of Scripture, venture to think that Christ's words and Paul's words have yet larger meanings than we have been wont to suppose? Meanwhile, let us be well assured of this, that He who was the heir of all the promises made to the fathers came not to dishonour the prophets, or to violate the law of God, but to give to them a deeper significance, and to work out for them a far higher accomplishment than ever had entered the heart of man to conceive. Dim at the best had been the vision of even the saintliest men of Israel into those deep things of God, which angels desired to look into, and were not able; and I daresay that Moses, and David, and Daniel, had they looked on the child of Bethlehem, and the spectacle of Calvary, would have been amazed to think that that was God's method of fulfilling the law and the prophets. ' But His ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts.'

But now in further applying the principle that a law,

or legal document may be at once fulfilled and annulled, let me say again that I cannot limit this to any particular part of the Old Testament Scriptures, reserving some other parts as still valid and authoritative. At least, I cannot do this, unless the New Testament itself declares what portions are abolished, and what remain in force. Obviously there were two courses which might have been adopted in such a case as this. The Legislature in framing new laws on any subject may, on the one hand, either generally declare that all previous enactments referring to it are hereby abrogated, and that the new law is to be the sole and exclusive authority in the matter; or, on the other hand, it may explicitly annul certain things, leaving all that is not thus distinctly specified as still the recognised and authoritative law. Now, in like manner, the New Testament might have explicitly stated that this, and that, and the other ordinance of Moses was abolished, but that all the rest was in as full force as ever it was; or it might have done what it actually has done—that is, it might have boldly asserted that all the ancient Scriptures are fulfilled, and also annulled, that not a fragment of them is dishonoured or broken, and yet that they are, as the legal and authoritative documents of the new covenant, abrogated and set aside. Very many excellent Christians have adopted the former view, setting aside the ceremonial and judicial part of the Mosaic ordinances as no longer binding, but resolutely clinging to other parts of the law and the prophets with a zeal and a tenacity and a passion which will not

tolerate either question or explanation. I can quite understand why they assume this position, and why they are so vehement in supporting it; and of that I will speak by and by. But meanwhile I would simply ask you to note that the New Testament, in point of fact, makes no such distinction,—that whatever it says about the law and the prophets is spoken as applicable to all alike, and that we have no right, without its distinct authority, to select this for abolition, and that for perpetuation. But if any one should say that he is prepared to act on the principle that all the Old Testament economy which is not expressly abrogated in the New is still binding on the Christian, then I would remind him that, even assuming that all the proper ceremonial law is so abolished, by far the greater part of the judicial law is left in full force, so far, at least, as regards direct and definite statements of the Lord or his apostles. The laws which acknowledge and regulate slavery; the law concerning Sabbath and jubilee years; the law of tithes; the laws which punish the adulterer and Sabbath-breaker and undutiful children with death,—these and a hundred other ordinances remain unrepealed by any explicit enactment of the New Testament. Is any one prepared to carry into practice these now obsolete statutes? Our fathers and the Puritans frankly allowed that those laws were not specifically abrogated, and therefore honestly they tried to work them out; honestly, manfully, consistently they did this; but, alas! with no very happy results. They were logical, and true to their logic; but what

standing-ground have we who repudiate what they saw clearly to be the inevitable result of their position, and yet insist that some parts of the Mosaic law, in virtue of their Mosaic character, are still the formal and authoritative statutes of the New Covenant ?

Brethren, the origin of the mistake I am now dealing with, at least as it appears among us at the present time, is very obvious ; and while I would maintain that intellectually it is a mistake, I must also hold that morally it is entirely creditable to the parties concerned. Those who cling so tenaciously to the idea that some portions of the Mosaic law are still formally binding on all men, manifestly do so because they believe the Decalogue to be identical with the moral law, and because they justly hold that the moral law never can be abrogated, and because they shrink with an intense and most righteous and most Christian repugnance, as we also shrink, from every aspect and shade and form and tendency of antinomianism. May I ask you, brethren, to believe me when I say that I do heartily sympathize with this feeling ? I am not in the way of protesting much ; but in this case I do protest that I look upon antinomianism as the devil's own version of the gospel, and the most thorough example of turning light into darkness that I have ever come across. An edition of the Bible printed in Gehenna, and cunningly bound in Tophet, and circulated by emissaries from the bottomless pit, would, without any exaggeration, express my idea of that wicked perversion of Christianity. Brethren, I look upon the Ten Command-

ments as ten of the weightiest words ever uttered by God to man. I cannot, for my part, conceive how any servant of God could, for a moment, deem himself justified in saying aught that could make light of them, or lessen the high esteem in which those grand and simple words have been held for so many ages. He is verily a slight man, and a flimsy thinker, a mere trifler in ethics, and in moral history blind, who cannot see that God's ancient people were, in virtue of those Ten Commandments, exalted mightily above the carnal heathen, having conscience developed thereby as it was nowhere else, and being brought, as none else were, into harmony with the thoughts and ways of Jehovah. Verily not without meaning were those laws engraven on stone by the finger of God. They do contain the elements of an everlasting duty, solid and abiding as the rocks. And for my part, instead of hinting, or whispering, or insinuating the faintest syllable to their dishonour, I would infinitely rather say that every jot and tittle and shade and fragment of them is for ever binding on all men, in all countries, and at all times, and that, precisely in the same sense as they were binding upon Israel of old. Infinitely rather the Decalogue in its veriest letter than the Decalogue in any sense dishonoured.

But granting all that, I must still fall back on Christ, and on the great truth of the gospel, that He has at once fulfilled and annulled the law. There is, of course, this difference between the proper moral law and the merely ceremonial, that while both alike are *formally*

abolished, yet the special observances of the one are actually put an end to, while those of the other are really more binding than ever. Let me note here, by way of clearing up some of the difficulty which troubles men's minds, that the law and the gospel being often contrasted with each other in order to bring out, in clear and distinct opposition, the difference between salvation by works and salvation by faith ; and these words, law and gospel, being also often used as synonymous with the Old Testament and the New, a common misunderstanding prevails on this head, to the effect that the gospel—the New Testament—contains no law proper, but only promises of mercy, provisions of grace, and hopes of divine forgiveness and glory. A loose and inaccurate use of words, in short, familiar to the philosophic thinker, has produced a sad confusion of ideas. But there could not be a more entire misunderstanding of the nature of the New Testament than to suppose that it contains no moral law, and that it is exclusively occupied with what is technically called the gospel. By far the greater part of our Lord's sayings are essentially a high, divine law, a more perfect Decalogue, to be written not on tables of stone, but on fleshly tablets of the heart. Nor is there a single Epistle, however fully setting forth the doctrine of the Cross, which is not penetrated throughout with moral principles and duties. Is there one commandment of the Decalogue which is not enforced and enlarged in the New Testament? There is not, indeed, any such brief compend of law as the ten weighty words of Sinai. But does not the New Testa-

ment require us to worship one God, the Father of all? Does it not forbid us to think that 'the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device?' Does it not require us to hallow the name of our Father who is in heaven? Does it not give us a Sabbath, not of rest merely, but of worship and fellowship and charity, such as the ancient Jew knew not for real solemnity and sacredness? Does it not forbid murder, stealing, filthiness, lies, and covetousness, as surely as ever was done by Moses? And, besides all this, does it not rise far above the region of mere negations, which narrowed of old times God's exceeding broad commandment; yea, far above the sphere of mere moral regulations, in whose bare literality so much room was found for cunning and sophistical casuistry: and, by laying down the great principle of love as the only fulfilling of the law, does it not shed into the heart of moral duty a light from heaven purer and more searching than any that broke through the clouds and darkness of Sinai? Hear the Lord Jesus proclaiming that 'God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.' And again, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength.' And again, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.'¹

¹ Of course, those great principles, or others equivalent to them, will be found in the Old Testament. The contrast drawn here has special reference to the Decalogue; yet as a whole, the two dispensations may also be contrasted in their ethical aspect, the one as characterized by *precepts* and the other by *principles*.

And can you fail to recognise in these broad, all-regulative principles a deeper law of religion and morality than is to be found in the two tables of stone—a law which supersedes them just because it fulfils them, and summons us to a loftier walk with God than that which guided the footsteps of his ancient people? Again, therefore, I repeat that the New Testament is now the one authoritative and sufficient document expressing to us the whole will of God; containing at once a far more perfect gospel, or revelation of his mercy, than that which was dimly typified in the emblems of the old covenant; and also a far deeper and broader law of moral duty than that which was engraven on the tables of stone. And hence it was that Jesus could truly say, even when about to abrogate the ancient Testament, ‘Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.’

What I have now stated with regard to the combination of a legal with the evangelical element in the New Testament, will help at once to remove another difficulty which seems to be troubling some minds—or rather two difficulties connected with the spiritual uses and necessity of a law. The first of these presents itself generally in some such form as this,—‘Does not,’ it is asked,—‘does not an apostle tell us that by the law is the knowledge of sin? “I had not known sin,” he says, “except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” But this knowledge, or conviction of sin is necessary in order to our getting the broken heart, which is God’s

accepted sacrifice,—necessary in order to our feeling the need of Christ; for the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to him. And, alas! if you abrogate the Decalogue, you will have few mourning for their sins, few weeping penitents, few prodigals sobbing, Father, I have sinned against thee—few fleeing for refuge to a Saviour, their need of whom they have never learnt, because the law that would have taught them has been said to be annulled.’ Thus do some men look at the matter, no doubt quite sincerely, only with a strange confusion of ideas. For manifestly their trouble arises from a sheer mistake. They confound the moral law and the Decalogue, as if these were identical. Now, the Decalogue was the moral law as revealed to ancient Israel, and a very blessed boon it was—perfect as far as it went, for there was neither error nor flaw in it. But though perfect in itself, as being without mistake, it certainly was not the perfect moral law. That, it was reserved for Jesus to reveal. The fulness of divine grace, and the fulness of human duty, were not to be discovered at different times, but in union the one with the other, as was fitting and best. The perfect law of God therefore emerges along with the final gospel of divine love. That in all things He might have the pre-eminence, the brightness of the glory of God, both in respect of moral holiness, and also in respect of tender mercy, shines into our hearts not in the face of Moses, but in the face of Christ Jesus. Will any one, then, venture to say that the Decalogue is a better schoolmaster than the searching spirituality of the law

revealed by Christ? Does Jesus deal with sinful souls less effectually than Moses? Does He heal their wounds slightly in comparison with the prophets? Was there not one day a young man who came to him, asserting confidently and honestly that he had kept the whole commandments from his youth up, and who so far was at ease in his mind, with no prickings of conscience, no broken-hearted contrition? And was it with a word from the old law, or a requirement of the new, that Jesus reached his soul, and filled him with a great sorrow? Yea, do not the prophets themselves declare that the godly sorrow which worketh true repentance is to be found, not by looking to the commandments, but by looking to Him whom we have pierced? O brethren! the thoughts that are current among us just now fill me, not with amazement only, but with solemn anxiety and fear, as a substantial denial of the all-sufficiency of Christ—a virtual dethroning and dishonouring of Him, the Lord's anointed. Can you suppose for one moment that the old law of Sinai produced more contrite hearts than Calvary, more tender consciences than Jesus, more broken spirits than the law and love of Christ? The moral law, as known to the Jews, was perfect so far, being free from error or mistake; but the perfect law of God is only uttered in the New Testament, and illustrated in the life of Jesus; and as it is there seen it is verily, far more than any word ever before spoken, quick and powerful, dividing asunder the joints and marrow of our being, a discernor of the thoughts and intents of our hearts, producing

more and truer and keener repentance than any that ever wept and lamented before the ark of the testimony of Israel.

But further, another difficulty to the reception of this truth arises from another quarter, and has an aspect of greater subtlety, if not solidity, though it springs from precisely the same mistake. What! it is asked, do you mean to substitute some internal, purely subjective principle for the clear, objective revelation of God's law? I do not much like the use of these two words, *subjective* and *objective*, only they are handy and expressive, and I do not know any better. The meaning is this: On the one hand, there is a law or rule written in a book, which is called the objective commandment; and on the other hand, there is within us a spirit of duty, which is in some measure a law to itself, regulating our conduct in accordance with certain principles of right,—and that is called a subjective rule. Both these laws exist, and all parties allow that they exist. Both have a province of their own, and most people allow they have such a province. There is an external law, ordained of God, and authoritatively requiring obedience; there are also internal principles, equally planted there by God—a law written on the heart,—and also claiming the right to regulate our conduct. And the difficulty which some men feel, or rather the reason which they put forth for refusing the truth I have been trying to enforce, is this: 'You want,' they say, 'to substitute the law of the spirit of the new life in Christ Jesus for the external and authoritative com-

mandment. You would give us a purely subjective power for the objective rule. You would make a man's heart the guide of life, and not the divine statutes. You would give us a most uncertain and fluctuating law instead of the everlasting testimony of Israel; and this we have practically found to be the first stage of antinomianism. All Church history proves that those who set out with a denial of external law, and who claim to be a law to themselves, and the only law they can acknowledge, inevitably, on that plea, justify in the long run any and every outrage of the law of God.' And so they conclude that this is the beginning of wickedness, and that they will and ought to resist its beginnings. They allow that the gospel of Christ brings a new motive for moral obedience, and a new, or at least greatly increased, power to yield such obedience; but the old external, objective divine law they cannot allow to be touched, even in the least of its commandments. Thus fully and fairly I have stated their opinion; for I have no wish to lessen its force. I have no motive for lessening its force; for I think there is a great truth in it, only there is also a very considerable mistake.

And the mistake lies here, brethren; for it will be best to put our finger on it at once. It lies in this, that we, who hold the Old Testament Scriptures to be abrogated as the authoritative Will¹ of God, do not, in point of fact, repudiate an objective moral law, or substitute a mere inward idea for it; but, on the contrary,

¹ The word *Will* here has obvious reference to the illustration formerly used of a Testament.

we hold—I at least, for my part, hold—as firmly as any man, by the outward, authoritative, New Testament commandment, which is the only full and perfect utterance of the law of God. In the New Testament I recognise a new, or at least a more persuasive, motive for obedience, in the redeeming love of Christ. He who brought Israel out of Egypt by great power and mighty wonders does not plead with such force as He who died for us that we might not perish, but have everlasting life. In the New Testament I also recognise that God gives a new, or at any rate a greatly increased, power to do the will of the Father; for even the prophets allowed that, in God's new covenant, He would write His laws in their hearts, that they might keep His commandments and walk in His statutes in a way that they had never done before. Thus, all will grant that under the gospel the motive is more persuading, and the power is more complete, than they were under the old economy. Moreover, it must also be admitted that there is a greater *inwardness* in the new covenant than in the old; that the idea of obedience springing not from an external command merely, but specially from the heart's love and delight in God, has a prominence in the gospel which it had not in the ancient dispensation. Not, indeed, that it was wanting in the Mosaic economy; for it was not. But all will admit that the New Testament economy is so far in advance of the Old, that there is more inwardness, more spirituality, more thoroughness in its moral duty than there was in the Old. So far all are agreed. So

far there can hardly indeed be any dispute whatever. But we do not abolish the external law. We do not substitute for it a dim, uncertain, changeful rule of right. I utterly repudiate any such doctrine. I sincerely acknowledge the necessity of an objective law, even to develop the internal idea of right. Look at the artist. He may be born with certain capabilities and susceptibilities for conceiving what is beautiful. He may possess from nature a certain exquisite ideal of what is true in form, and fair in colour, and right in its expression of human emotion. In his silent musings and in his lofty dreams he may be ever prompted by dim gropings and aspirations after a perfect ideal; and indeed, if there is no such law in his inward life, he will come to nothing in the end. But, on the other hand, he must also look out on the fair forms and colours of the outer world. He must brood over the high achievements of former art and skill. He must fill his soul with models of every varied passion and emotion touched by the painter's pencil, or carved with the sculptor's chisel. An external law, imperfect perhaps, yet true as far as it goes, is necessary to quicken and ripen his own inward ideal. His genius commonly smoulders till it be kindled thus from without; and its rich and fruitful powers are unfolded in proportion as he has opportunity for studying and copying these forms of graceful beauty. And as it is with the artistic nature, so is it with the moral. All men have doubtless a conscience—a certain susceptibility for judging of what is right or wrong. But where there is no ex-

ternal revelation of God's will, that conscience is generally shrivelled and withered up, and of little vital force; it lies smouldering under heaps of immoral tradition and superstition. Among the Jews it was largely set free from these, being quickened into vigorous exercise, and developed to a measure of comparative efficiency by means of the Ten Commandments. But no one can read the history of their most saintly men—men, too, sustained in their path of righteousness by frequent miraculous help and supernatural insight—without feeling that, in respect of moral light, the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than they were. The Christian conscience possesses the advantage of a higher law than they knew; consequently it is more keenly sensitive, more fully developed, and covers a far larger field of recognised duty. Instead, then, of substituting the inward idea for the external commandments, I frankly acknowledge that the law of the spirit of life in our hearts attains to its fulness and vigour and purity just in virtue of the perfect revelation of God's will which is made to us in the New Testament. In Christ we get a new motive for obeying the law. Through Christ we obtain a new power for keeping its statutes. But in Christ also we have a new and higher conception of what moral duty is; for the dim gropings and uncertain susceptibilities of natural conscience are guided and unfolded by Him who alone teacheth us the perfect way of God's commandments. There is no question, then, between us as to the propriety of substituting an internal and varying concep-

tion of duty for an external and unchanging law. It is simply one of the unfair tricks of controversy to put the matter in that light, and so create a prejudice. All are agreed that there is an objective law revealed from heaven. All are agreed that there is also a subjective moral power, or conscience, which is at once directed and developed by that revelation of God's will. And the only question really at issue is this: Do the New Testament Scriptures contain the complete and perfect expression of that law, or have they to be supplemented by portions of the Old? Is Christ sufficient in himself, or must his imperfect Testament be helped out by selections from Moses—selections, too, made purely at our own will, without any authority of Scripture to guide us what we are to choose and what we are to reject? That is the real state of the question; and while I frankly admit that, in trying thus to blend some parts of the Old Testament economy with the New, a large amount of the spirit of Christianity has been infused into the Jewish ordinances, enlarging and elevating our idea of them; yet, on the other hand, I am equally certain that in adopting this course the Church has not only acted without warrant, but has often in the course of her varied history encroached upon the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and has marred the spirit of the gospel quite as often as she has refined that of the ancient covenant. Look back on the sad pages of Christian story—sad in spite of many a noble heroism and holy service,—and as you read the tale of cruel persecutions, and absurd preten-

sions, and meddlesome interferences, and grasping claims, let me tell you, you will lose all the lessons of wisdom to be gathered from such facts, if you ascribe them to any peculiar wickedness in those by whom they were done; for they were often good, and loving, and pious, and true men; but they were men who tried to work out both the Old Testament and the New, and the consequence was that they turned the gospel of Christ into oppression, and cruelty, and wrong. Hence it is that I am so anxious to impress it on you that the law and the prophets are alike fulfilled and annulled in Christ; for I am quite certain that in any attempt to combine them, if the law will gain something, the gospel will suffer more. Moses may be enlarged, but Christ will far more be straitened.

There is one point on which I have not touched, simply because all are agreed about it. That the old law, moral as well as ceremonial, is abolished so far as regards our justification, no one among us entertains any doubt whatever. Not by obedience to it is any soul saved; nor is its condemnation valid against the children of God. By faith alone we are saved, not by any works of righteousness which we have done. That applies equally to the law as revealed in the Old Testament or the New. As a law of righteousness for us it is all alike taken out of the way and nailed to the cross; for even the Ten Commandments, and still more the deeper and more spiritual moral requirements of the gospel, are, in that sense, to one and all of us, not a law of righteousness and life, but a law of sin and death.

We have fully kept neither of them. We have transgressed in many things, and come short in all. Verily, Christ is the end of all law for righteousness to every one that believeth, and of the New Testament law even more than of the Old, because it is so much harder to obey. But being wholly at one on that head, let me say in conclusion, that through our faith in Christ we are not delivered from law, but rather delivered over unto a better law—the law of the new life in Jesus. To be set free from moral law would be simply to be cut off from all fellowship with God. That were a very devil's gospel, fit only for the blackness of the outer darkness. But while Christ delivers us from the condemnation which our sins have deserved, he brings us into new and loving relations with a new and glorious law which is not to be observed as a bondage or a mere letter, but with a joyful delight in its spirit and truth, by meek endurance, by patient trust, by merciful kindness, by integrity of life, by truth in the inward parts, by charity towards all men, by guileless simplicity, by honest thought and dealing, by self-sacrifice, by the pure heart, by walking in the spirit and footsteps of Jesus, who is in all things our example, and in following whom only shall we do the will of our Father which is in heaven.

So He came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil them. And so might he most truly say, 'Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.'

V.

THE LAW KEPT BY LOVE.

'Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill ; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment : but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment ; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council ; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee ; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him ; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.'—MATT. v. 21-26.

As I stated in last lecture, the moral law of God cannot be abolished, but abideth for ever and ever. It may be more fully revealed at one time than at another. But such a more perfect discovery will only deepen its meaning, and strengthen its authority, and can in no wise weaken its binding claims. For moral law is not a mere arbitrary appointment. It is not so much an expression of God's will as it is the very law of his own just and holy Being, in obedience to which, and only in such obedience, can we really enjoy fellowship with the Father. Certainly, the Lord Jesus did not come to

deliver us from obedience to that law, but to take away its condemnation, and to take away our enmity, and to bring us more entirely and spiritually under subjection to it. And accordingly He says, 'He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.'

Now, the Scribes and Pharisees, while affecting to honour the law, and to be exceedingly scrupulous in its observance, had really by their quibbling glosses and literalities been straining the very life-blood out of it. From an allusion in verse 19, I suppose that, for one thing, they had been distinguishing the commandments into little ones and great ones; with the usual result, no doubt, of leading men to think that some sins were venial, and others mortal. Now, of course, there are some sins 'which are more heinous in the sight of God than others.' To take a man's life is a weightier offence than to steal his goods. But every jot and tittle of the moral law is most sacredly binding, and carries with it the most awful penalties in case of disobedience; for there is no such thing as venial sin, and there is no more mischievous exercise of casuistry than to speak of some commandments and some transgressions as if they were of little moment. It is one of the most common snares laid for the conscience by the ingenious subtlety of men, to discuss the comparative importance of certain duties, instead of upholding the supreme authority of all, and of the great lawgiver of

all; and therefore Jesus declared in one place that he who is guilty in one point, is just as really guilty as if he had broken the whole law; and therefore also he says here, that 'whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, the same shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. For except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

You will remember, that in the introductory lecture to these discourses on our Lord's sermon on the mount, I stated to you that the passage beginning at verse 21, and going on to the end of this chapter, might be called the first head or division of the sermon; and that its specific object was to illustrate the principle that God's law must be fulfilled not in the letter only, but in the spirit. That great principle he explains now by showing its application in reference to various commandments and customs, and also how it rebuked the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. But before going into the details, there are two preliminary observations which require to be made.

1. When I say that the law must be kept not in the letter, but in the spirit, I mean of course that it may be kept in the letter, while the spirit is utterly neglected; but I do not mean that one may obey it in spirit while violating the letter. There are circumstances indeed in which the literal observance would really be a transgression of the deep spiritual meaning of the law. Were you absolutely, when smitten on one cheek, to

turn the other also, I question very much whether that would be an illustration of the meek and patient spirit which our Lord there enjoins. And when some men so understand the words, 'Swear not at all,' as to refuse an oath in a court of justice for securing the administration of righteousness, again I am afraid that they are not carrying out the real meaning of the commandment. But, in general, when we say that God's law is to be obeyed not in the letter, but in the spirit, we mean that it requires both the one and the other,—both the actual observance of what is clearly enjoined, and also the inward and heartfelt and genuine submission of our souls to the whole broad spirit of the law. What is intended, in short, is that, in the first instance, there is to be an absolute and literal obedience to what the Lord requires; but that we are not to stop short there, for the formal injunction is after all only the symbol of a deeper and wider spirit which we are bound to understand, and to bring our whole souls under subjection to it. We must obey both in the letter and in the spirit also.

2. My other preliminary observation here is, that this principle, though it stands forth with a peculiar vividness in the New Testament Scriptures, was by no means absent from the Old. The Scribes and Pharisees, indeed, in their casuistical glosses, had practically set it aside altogether. They had established a kind of moral, or rather immoral science, by which they lorded it at once over the human conscience and over the divine law; a science the great object of which seemed to be, to see

how narrow they could make the exceeding broad commandment, how far they could reduce it to a dead and impotent literality. But the law itself was always spiritual. In the Psalms we find this spirituality most distinctly acknowledged over and over again. David longs for truth 'in the inward parts,' and prays for 'the clean heart;' and with his whole soul he loves the statutes of the Lord. In particular, this truth appears fully disclosed in the tenth commandment, which is not so much an additional and specific requirement as it is an injunction to yield a true spiritual obedience to all the previous commandments. For you shall find its full and real meaning best, if you apply it to the previous statutes of the Decalogue, and understand it to mean this, that, passing beyond the region of mere external observance, it requires us not to steal by coveting our neighbour's property, and not to kill by coveting or grudging our neighbour's life, and not to commit adultery by coveting our neighbour's wife, nor yet to bear false witness against him by coveting his good name. It would be a mere Pharisaic notion to regard the old law of the Lord as one that demanded only external and literal observances. All our relations with the heart-searching God were, and are, and must always be, spiritual; for He never could have been pleased with a heartless and formal obedience. Therefore, again, I repeat that, while Jesus goes on here to illustrate the principle that God's law must be fulfilled, not in the letter only, but also in the spirit, he is not introducing any novelty into the Church, for it was always

so recognised by the real saints of God. At the same time He does certainly exhibit this truth with a fulness which it never had before. He fulfils the law by pouring into it a light akin to what it always possessed, but purer and brighter than ever yet had entered into the heart of man to conceive.

In dealing with this principle, then, our Lord adduces certain examples by way of illustration, and asserts for Himself a high right and authority to declare to the people the very will of God in the matter. He reminds them of certain things which had been said by 'them of old time.' Of these sayings some are selected from the Ten Commandments, some from other parts of the Mosaic law, and some apparently from the glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees. But no matter with what authority they had been spoken, Jesus claims it as his prerogative to enlarge, or to alter them by His own authority. I know nothing more emphatically indicative of his divine right to speak to men as the very Son of God than the simple 'I say unto you,' so frequently recurring in this chapter. The everlasting God had spoken from Mount Sinai, and written on stone tables his unbending law; but this meek and lowly man has no scruple, and no fear, and no presumption either, in dealing with those commandments as the Lawgiver only could deal with them, and, with a voice of calm authority, not to be questioned, He explains their real meaning, and enforces their high claims, and enlarges their spirit and power. No man indeed can read these expositions and injunctions of the Lord, without feeling that every word He

utters tends to the real fulfilment of God's will. It was his meat and drink to do that will. He rejoiced in it, rejoiced to know it, rejoiced to obey it, rejoiced to exalt and honour it. But because He was the only-begotten Son, who was one with the Father, He also claimed the right to fill up, to complete, in virtue of his divine character, the whole spiritual import of that holy law, resting his expositions on no derived authority, but on his own solemn assertion, 'I say unto you.' And take heed, brethren, lest ye dishonour Christ, the brightness of the Father's glory, by refusing to him this his inalienable power and prerogative.

Now, the first of the divine commandments which He handles here, with the view of showing its real spiritual character, is that which concerns the preservation of human life. It had been said by them of old time, said in fact by God, 'Thou shalt not kill.' No doubt, the Scribes and Pharisees, with their usual meagre literalism, had restricted, and qualified, and explained away this law, showing in how many cases killing might be no murder, and, at any rate, limiting the guilt of this offence to the actual and criminal taking of human life. And, of course, our Lord's exposition rebuked all such unspiritual glosses. But it may be also fully allowed that the Old Testament saints, the men really filled with the Spirit of God, took a far larger view of their duty than the Pharisees did; and felt that they were called to do everything in their power to preserve the life of their neighbour. I would be very slow to think that men like Samuel and David and Isaiah had any

part whatever in the casuistical literalities of the Pharisees. They were true men, spiritual men, loving and righteous men; and the law of God was no meagre ordinance to them of formal obedience, but verily and for ever an exceeding broad commandment. At the same time, I question very much whether any of them had any idea of the high requirements of this law, as here set forth by Jesus. At any rate, it must be clear to you all, that, while the literal observance of it still remained in full force, one might be perfectly guiltless of any transgression in that respect, and yet, for all that, he might be most truly a murderer according to the interpretation of Christ; for he that speaketh evil of his brother may take away his life; and he that hateth his brother hath already the spirit of murder in his heart. But the precise words of our Lord here will require a somewhat nicer investigation.

You will observe that there is a word, '*Raca*,' which is left here untranslated; and another word, '*More*,' which is translated, 'Thou fool.' Now, the former of these words was an expression of contempt or scorn, nearly equivalent to our saying that such an one has played the fool. The latter word, which is translated 'fool,' seems to imply more deliberate wickedness, and is liker our English *miscreant* or *villain*. Our Lord then may be understood here as saying that the man who without cause is wroth with his brother; and the man who scornfully says of another that he has played the fool; and again, the man who maliciously speaks of his neighbour as a *miscreant* or *villain*—all of them alike

are guilty of breaking this law. You will observe further, that there are three different expressions to indicate the gradations of the penalty thus incurred. The judgment was the common court that sat in every city gate for the trial of ordinary offenders, and it was empowered to inflict certain punishments. The council, or sanhedrim, was a higher judicial body, who were authorized by the law to condemn a criminal to be stoned with stones until he die. Gehenna was the name given to the Valley of Hinnom, where once Moloch was worshipped by fire, and where now men guilty of very heinous offences were burnt to death, so that the name became a symbol of hell-fire. The sum of the whole matter then is, not that men were to inflict these punishments on the parties indicated; but that, in the sight of God, the causeless anger, the cruel scorn, and the malignant speech, were all infractions of this law, and would all receive one day their merited and fitting punishment. There might be gradations in the amount of guilt, and all these would doubtless be taken into account, and the penalty rightly adjusted to the crime. But this, at any rate, is certain, the law, 'Thou shalt not kill' might be broken, not merely by the violent invasion of life, but also by the wicked tongue and the cruel thought; and for all of these alike, God will bring us into judgment.

Such, my friends, is the Lord's exposition of this commandment, and such is the way in which He will have it to be fulfilled. There was need of some such interpretation in his days, for the Scribes and Pharisees

had gone far to narrow the law into a miserable letter. But is there not still the same evil to be combated? Doubtless, you all recognise the exceeding sacredness of human life. There is no crime which is regarded with more natural horror than that of the man who sheddeth his brother's blood. Whether the fell deed be done by the rude weapon of violence, or by the knife of the stealthy assassin, or by the bowl of the cunning poisoner, you shrink with an almost pitiless abhorrence from the murderer; and you feel as if even inanimate nature must rise up against him, and stern eyes look into him out of the darkness, and spectral forms of terror haunt him with remorse and fear, until the law he has broken shall have been avenged. That is all right and natural; evermore the law abideth, 'Thou shalt not kill;' evermore the true heart will shudder and revolt at such a crime. But think not that the bowl or the bullet or the dagger are the only weapons that take away life. There are words that kill as effectually as the deadliest poisons; and the law of God is not for mere Cains or Lamechs, and other high-handed criminals only. Have you not all heard—ay, perhaps known,—of cases in which foul murder was done by a cruel word,—cases in which malignant gossip whispered of some one 'Raca,—she hath played the fool!' and by and bye she who was but a little ago as blithe and beautiful and healthful as ever gladdened a fireside, now, with pallid cheek and drooping form, withers away into an untimely grave? Was there no law broken by that whispered 'Raca'? Is there to be no remorse for that victim of

heartless evil-speaking? Think ye God has no penalty for offences such as these? Nay brethren, whoever shall say to his brother 'Raca,' shall be in danger of the judgment. Again, thoughtlessly it may be, and with utter indifference to the consequences, you take up an ill report against your brother; or harshly and hastily and without inquiry judging him, you whisper 'Moré—he is acting as a rogue, a miscreant;' and so you rob him of his good name; and he, being perhaps a sensitive and tender spirit, finds himself surrounded with an atmosphere of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, and distrust and cruel suspicion, under whose hateful influence, innocent as he is, life's feeble taper gradually flickers and expires. Again, I ask, is there no law broken there? Is there to be no remorse for the murders wrought by malignant tongues? Are men to be free to shoot these poisoned arrows at their brethren, and yet claim to be maintaining the law of the living God? That is what the Pharisees did; and our Lord's words to them were, 'I say unto you, whoever calleth his brother *Moré* shall be in danger of Gehenna.' Nor does that holy and heart-searching law stop short even there. It is not enough to refrain from criminal action, or malignant speech; God's requirements penetrate beneath these outward things, and lay claim to the very innermost thoughts of our heart. He who is wroth with another without cause, is also guilty of breaking this law. No doubt there is an anger which may be to some extent justifiable. To be indignant at any one guilty of a base, ignoble deed, that is to be angry, and sin not.

But to be angry with a brother who has injured us, is not, indeed, to be angry without cause altogether, yet there is no small peril in indulging such feelings, and the wrath which is caused by personal wrong is just the murderous spirit of revenge. However, that which is condemned specially by our Lord here, is the anger which springs up properly without cause—such, *e.g.*, as the wrath of Cain, which arose from the malignant passion of envy because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Ah ! brethren, I beseech you, take heed, and watch and pray against such thoughts as these. They are the roots and germinating forces of all most fell and hateful crimes. Cherish them, and the children who have prayed at the same mother's knee, may repeat the old sad tragedy of Cain and Abel. But even if it never come to open acts of crime, the very thoughts of envy, malice, and hate are murderous ; and God's law is only fulfilled when thou lovest thy brother with a true evangelical love, a love like that of Christ ; loving him for all the good that may be in him, loving him in spite of all the bad that may be in him, loving to do him all the good you can, loving to make him better as far as in you lies. For this, and this only, is the fulfilling of the law, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour even as thyself.'

In the remaining verses we have a beautiful application of the law, showing its bearing on the true worship of God. Assuming that any of those forms of sin will be condemned at the throne of judgment, Jesus reasons that they will be equally offensive at the throne of grace ; if they merit divine wrath, they will prevent divine mercy,

unless they be confessed and repented. 'Therefore,' he says, 'if thou bring thy gift before the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.' And again, he adds, in order that no delay may take place, for it is not a matter that may be safely put off, ' Agree with thine adversary whiles thou art in the way with him'—avail thyself of the present opportunity,—' lest at any time thine adversary deliver thee to the judge, and thou be cast into prison.' The general drift of the passage is this : If we have wronged our brother, if we have cherished thoughts of causeless anger against him, or if we have uttered evil words about him ; or if he has wronged us so as to stir up bitter and revengeful feelings in our minds, which may seem to be justified by his conduct, but are in reality wicked and ungodly ; then it will be in vain that we come to the altar with either thank-offerings, or sin-offerings ; in vain that we draw near to the God of all grace with either praise, or prayer, unless we go and make it up with him ; for we cannot say to any purpose, ' Forgive us our debts,' unless we can also say, ' as we forgive our debtors.' And it should be observed that Jesus calmly assumes it as a thing likely enough to happen, that men may actually be guilty of such conduct ; that the heart may be so deceitful as to go up to God's holy altar full of malignant hate, conscious of having cherished wrathful thoughts and spoken wrathful words against another, and yet expecting the

righteous God to accept its offering. Very earnestly and solemnly, therefore, he warns us, if even at the very altar we find such passions in us, or remember such words to have been spoken by us, to lose not a moment in casting out those thoughts and acknowledging those offences ; for the wrong that is done and cherished to a brother will hurl our petitions from a throne of grace. Let no time be lost then, but as soon as you call to mind the evil you have done, let it be confessed and repented, lest the opportunity be gone ; for be assured of it, that causeless wrath, cruel scorn, malignant speech, if not covered with godly sorrow, will be such a dead fly in the apothecary's ointment, as to cause our best and devoutest worship utterly to stink before the Lord.

O brethren, by the mercies of God I entreat you to think of this solemn and earnest word. Why is it that our general religious life is so poor and meagre and unspiritual ? Why is it that our prayers seem to fall leaden-winged and helpless and fruitless to the ground ? Why are we so little refreshed and strengthened and helped for the battle of life by all our multiplied devotions ? Why is it that we have so little joy in God, so little glory in tribulation, so little peace amid all the changeful troubles of the world, and that we make so little progress in the life of faith ? That we are in these days so meagre and poor and feeble a folk is the all but universal complaint ; and I cannot but allow there is much truth in it. But when I witness the causeless anger of brother against brother ; when I

hear on all hands the cry of 'Raca' and 'Moré'—fool and rogue—passing from mouth to mouth, reckless how it may wound tender souls to the very death ; when I find that such things are done, and even gloried in, I do not wonder that men bring their gifts to the altar, and do not find a gracious God there. I daresay many do not remember it even when they come to the altar ; I daresay some who do remember it, try to persuade themselves it is right. But God has commanded of old, 'Thou shalt not kill.' And Christ has indorsed and expounded that law as forbidding all envy, hatred, malice, and evil-speaking. And, therefore, the gift at the altar is an offering of abomination which is brought by a heart full not of love and gentleness, but of hate and bitterness ; and the prayer will never enter the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, which is pleaded by lips that have just been crying fool and miscreant at a brother.

Of course, in saying this, I am assuming that the parties so accused are innocent, and that those who indulge in such feelings, or utter such words about them, are wantonly giving way to wrath and bitterness. There are fitting times, when it is right, and in the interests of law and justice, to discover the folly of the fool and the roguery of the miscreant ; though in doing so we must take heed that our motives are such as can bear the scrutiny of the heart-searching God. Still, if it be not done in malice, it is right on proper occasions to be angry at the wrong-doer, and to proclaim his wrong-doing. Some of the sternest, sharpest words ever

uttered were spoken by the meek and gentle Jesus concerning the Pharisees, because it was high time to lay bare those whited sepulchres and their rottenness. There is a duty of severity as well as of mercy ; and mercy to the wicked may be cruelty to the righteous. Such cases, however, are easily distinguishable from the wanton and malignant, or heartless and thoughtless, evil-speaking, to which the Lord here refers. And, therefore, in summing up the whole of this matter, let me again remind you with all earnestness, that the law, the ever-abiding law, 'Thou shalt not kill,' is not to be read only according to the letter, as if it merely forbade the violent invasion of life, but that in its true spirit it can only be kept when we love each other as Christ hath loved us. It is possible to do cruel murder by other means than by the bowl of the poisoner, or the knife of the assassin. The tongue is an unruly member, full of deadly poison ; and the wanton cry of fool or rogue hath laid its victims in the grave as surely as the blow of a bludgeon, or a bullet in the brain. And even though no such fatal result can issue from it, yet the unspoken feeling of envy, malice, or hate, hath in it the guilt of murder too ; and he that cherishes, or gives way to such evil passions is verily, in the sight of God, as another Cain upon the earth ; for His law requires truth and love in the inward parts. And if we yield ourselves either to wrathful and bitter thoughts, or to contemptuous and malicious words, our offerings, and prayers, and devotions, and all other our most pious services in which we seem to delight, shall not be

accepted at the throne of grace, shall not obtain the blessing from the God of our salvation, and shall not bring to us the joy which they are meant to bring. Iniquity and solemn meeting the Lord hates. To what purpose is the multitude of our oblations while we go on in our envy, malice, hatred, evil-speaking, and uncharitableness? Brethren, such things dry up and wither our spiritual life, and stunt our growth in grace, and make us to be indeed the least in the kingdom of heaven. For it hath come sorrowfully to pass in these years that, to a great extent, a man's faithfulness and zeal and Christian discipleship are estimated, not by the love he bears to all his brethren in the Lord, but rather by the hatred he bears to all who happen to differ from him in opinion, by the harsh construction he puts on all they say and do, and by his readiness to cry 'Raca' and 'Moré'—fool and rogue—at all his adversaries. Woe is me! And can you wonder that in such circumstances spiritual life is at a low ebb, and men feel as if their souls were in a dry and parched land where no water is? Beloved, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there, even there, at the last moment, remember that your brother hath aught against you; if your heart is so deceitful as to have cherished causeless anger, or indulged in malicious speech, and yet has thought to be accepted of the righteous God; pause for a moment, and mock not the heart-searcher; pause and repent lest a worse thing befall you; pause, and lose not the opportunity of being reconciled to your brother, for it is not him only you are wronging, but

your own soul too, and God's holy law, and God's gracious gospel, all of which miserably suffer, unless you and I are labouring to walk in love, as Christ gave us an example that we should walk in his steps.

VI.

THE LAW KEPT BY LOVE.

'Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.'—MATT. v. 27-32.

THE second illustration of the true spiritual obedience which the law of God requires is taken from the seventh commandment; and though the subject is not one which it is easy to handle in a promiscuous assembly, yet the moral well-being of society requires that neither should it be slightly passed over; for, after all, true delicacy lies, not in ignoring the existence of sin, but in resisting it, and striving to remove it.

And here let me say in the outset that this commandment, and all the other concurring laws which bear upon the subject of moral purity, had been of un-

speakable benefit to the people of Israel. For whereas they were surrounded on all hands by nations that were, in this respect, rotten to the very core—nations given over to all vileness and filthiness,—it is certain that the Jews, on the whole, were quite unusually free of that sorrowful stain which defiled and degraded the neighbouring peoples. Even Greece, with all the splendour of her intellectual powers and achievements, and Rome with her stern polity, wise in all the arts of law and government, were so tainted with this vice that conscience had all but forgotten that it was a vice, and was not ashamed of its sin. Of course, if this was the case among the colder and better regulated communities of the West, you can easily imagine that the Eastern empires, always more prone to yield themselves to the indulgence of a voluptuous appetite, would present a picture of moral impurity of which we may say nothing more than this, that its very religious worship was a consecrated obscenity. But in the midst of all this vileness the families of Israel maintained a high and most happy singularity. Not that there were no mournful examples of a very different spirit. Not that the marriage-law of Israel was at all on a level either with the primitive, or with the Christian law. It is the very object of our Lord here to show that it was not, and that so far it was defective. But still the matrons and maidens of Israel walked in a chaste and delicate modesty, unspotted by the vices of the neighbouring world. The streets of Jerusalem were not defiled by the effronteries of a flaunting courtesanship. The

damselfs of cheerful Galilee sang with pure and honest hearts as they ground the daily corn, or plucked the grape-clusters from the bending vine. When, indeed, the idolatries of Assur, or Egypt, or Moab, made them to forget the God of Abraham, the prophets complain that the land became polluted with consequent adulteries, and sternly and mournfully they cry out against these iniquities. But as a general rule, Israel and Judah had learnt this lesson as no other nation had learnt it; and this high moral level to which they had attained was most certainly owing to the pure and authoritative law of their God.

The practical benefits reaped by the covenant people from the various statutes, some of them very severe, bearing on this point, cannot for a moment be questioned. Indeed, they are so manifest that some thoughtful writers have not hesitated to say that perhaps the most significant characteristic of Jewish history is just this fact of the moral purity of its women. That is certainly going too far. The chief result of their history, as I read it, is something higher even than that—higher than any question of social morality; for they were set apart to maintain a testimony for the unity and spirituality, and righteousness of God, and to illustrate this by faith in His word. Yet it is certain that one most obvious and significant and blessed result of that faith was, that it filled the land with pure and happy homes, ‘cutting away the filthiness of the flesh,’ and creating a far nobler and holier domestic life than could be found elsewhere in all the ancient world. And I

think this should be borne in mind when we are reading some of the ancient prophets. The custom of interpreters has been to use the words *adultery* and *idolatry* as synonymous terms, and to explain this usage by the metaphor that Israel was as a wife espoused by Jehovah, so that all worship of idols was akin to the faithlessness of a spouse. And so far that is quite right. Israel was the bride whom He had chosen, and was called to a lowly, loving, and faithful worship of her Lord. But the evil against which Hosea and others cried out was no merely metaphorical vice. When God's law was forsaken, Israel became most literally an adulterous people, like her neighbours. When God's law was maintained, straightway the homes of Judah were filled again with an atmosphere of moral purity. Hosea does not cry and mourn against a mere figurative sin, but against one that was terribly real at all times when Israel departed from the statutes of the Lord; and therefore I would like you to understand that, in a profoundly important sense, to have a divine law is really to obtain a singular divine grace. It is a great favour to a people to be legislated for by the living God; and in keeping of his commandments there is ever a great reward. Israel was honoured, helped, purified, and comforted by the possession of these statutes; and while other countries might exhibit qualities of intellectual pre-eminence higher perhaps than theirs, these were far more than counterbalanced by the lofty moral purity which reigned among the households of Jacob.

1. Yet this law, as it was practised in Judah, was not quite the law which must rule over the Christian. It is difficult to say how far the proper spirituality of its claims was appreciated by the people in general. I have already said that David felt it to be 'exceeding broad;' and I cannot, for my part, believe that the saintly men of the Old Testament ages could ever have narrowed their obedience to a mere formal and external rule. No doubt, they did understand that the God of Abraham required a most heartfelt and genuine submission to every one of His injunctions. But how far the general conscience was instructed in regard to the real inwardness and spirituality of true obedience, that is not so easy to determine. One thing, however, is perfectly clear, and that is, that at this time when Jesus began to teach, that true spiritual obedience needed to be discovered anew; for it had been miserably obscured by the dust and rust of Pharisaic interpretation. Consequently, when Jesus adduced the commandment as they had heard it laid down by them of old time, he felt himself constrained to add a word which profoundly, and even terribly, deepened its meaning, and which must have flashed convictions of sin into many a heart present. For virtually the Lord said, 'The Fathers have told you that God's law is, Thou shalt not commit adultery. Well, that is true; for evermore true, and binding on all men. It is one of the most marked and significant characteristics of His covenant with you, that ye shall not yield yourselves to filthiness of the flesh. Ye men, and matrons

and maidens of Israel, God hath sealed you to himself, by many a sacred blood-sprinkling and baptism, that ye should walk before him blameless, and clean and unspotted from this pollution of the world.' Most clearly does He thus enforce the old law of Sinai. But then He goes on to say, 'This commandment requires a deeper and holier observance than that of mere outward behaviour. It is far broader than ye may have imagined. It may be broken by wicked lusts quite as effectually as by wicked acts: "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."' Let me entreat you to note the exceeding spirituality of this law. The true moral perfection which God requires, and at which we should all be aiming, struggling to attain it, demands not merely outward good conduct, and a refraining from actual wickedness; and also not merely a steadfast resistance to, and quenching of, sinful lusts; but positively a pure heart in which such desires shall not arise to defile us. I am perfectly aware that this state of moral purity is never absolutely attained while we are in the flesh. The body of death clings to us; and the lusts of sin rise up as bubbles in the impure fountain within us, do what we will. And, therefore, it might be said that all that can really be required of a man is, that he shall resist these, and refuse assent to their evil instincts; and then if he do so, he has not sinned. But this is not the whole truth of God. It is indeed good to resist the tendency to do what is wrong; but that is not enough, if the lust still remains.

It is good to fight against the sinful instinct ; but that is not enough, if it still return upon us. What the covenant of God promises and provides for his people is, not merely a power to resist and tread down the embers of evil within us, but a positive new heart to love, and to love only what is holy and pure and good. Still, I am ready to admit that in this world this newness of heart is only partly realized, and is always accompanied with something of the old nature. Only I would like you to bear this in mind, that, as often as a sinful lust rises up in you, even though you resist its craving, yea, even though you drive it out of your mind as speedily as possible, yet you have not the really pure heart, and are not quite perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. ‘He that looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her in his heart.’ He may resist it so far as not to do the evil thing. He may even refuse to cherish the very thought itself. And so far all well. But a nature wholly renewed after the image of Christ has no such thoughts at all. No bitter water springs up in its sweet fountain. No darkness mingles with its light. And so long as such lusts arise in us, we are still guilty in the sight of the true and holy One. It is not enough to resist and keep down the fire ; the fire must be wholly quenched. Christianity does not undertake merely to enable us to resist temptation, but to extinguish it altogether. For surely they are wrong who say that sin lies wholly and only in the will. If my will be renewed, so that I never consent unto evil,

that is so far good ; yet if my heart, or mind, or flesh is perpetually suggesting evil, I am not yet wholly conformed unto God. Now, it is this conformity which Christ aims to produce ; and so long as a man cherishes sinful lusts, even though he does not carry them into action ; and so long as a man feels sinful lusts, even though he does not cherish but resists them ; so long is he liable to the condemnation of the law, which is altogether holy and just and good.

2. But of course this state of perfection is not attained all at once, nor yet without diligent and painful effort. Hence the Lord calls us to an exercise of self-denial and a crucifying of the flesh with its affections and lusts. 'If thine eye offend thee,' or cause thee to offend rather, 'pluck it out and cast it from thee.' The point of these words lies in the 'cast it from thee.' Jesus does not intend that there should be a literal maiming of ourselves in order that we may be pure and perfect. In fact, victory attained by any such process would not be truly victory, for the battle would not be fairly contested ; nay more, it would not be victory at all, for the sinful lust might linger still in the mind when the eye was plucked out, and the hand was cut off. The true idea here is, that if the use of any organ, or member of the body suggests evil to the soul—if the eye, for example, by looking on a form of beauty, arouses in the mind any evil or impure appetites, then are we to deny ourselves what might otherwise have been an innocent gratification, 'mortifying our members which are on earth.' That is to say, if this battle with sin is to be

fought effectually, we must not give way so far, and only arrest ourselves on the eve of actual transgression, but we must come down upon all the predisposing causes of iniquity, and check *them*; we must kill it in the tap-roots and first beginnings of it; and even that which in itself might be lawful, we must resist and deny, if we find that in anywise it cause us to offend. This, brethren, is the part of the work which is specially laid to our hands. I grant at once that the mere negation and deprivation of certain innocent indulgences will not of itself purify our hearts; I grant that we need in addition, as Jesus elsewhere abundantly shows, perpetual quickenings and accesses of a holy and good spirit. But, in the first instance, we must strive to empty our house of the unclean spirit, and to shut up all the avenues of his approach, by denying ourselves and crucifying the flesh, by plucking out, as it were, the offending eye, and cutting off the offending hand, and so preparing the way for the more abundant entrance of the Holy Ghost. For surely it were better for us to lose a pleasure which we might have otherwise enjoyed, and to be, as it were, maimed for a season, than, for any such gratification, to forfeit eternal life. Let us begin, then, by rooting out the hidden causes of evil; let us not wait till they have sprung up and are on the verge of yielding their bitter fruits; let us arrest the lust in its first stages, for 'lust when it hath conceived bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.' Better to enter heaven maimed and blind than for such things to be cast into hell-fire.

3. But further, our Lord here not only demands a true spiritual obedience to God's law, by asserting that the sinful lust is as truly forbidden as the sinful act, and by requiring us therefore to resist the very beginnings and tendencies to evil ; further, He explicitly sets aside a portion of the Jewish law of marriage as tending to produce adulterous conduct. In the beginning, he tells us in another place, God made man a male and a female, and ordained that they twain should be one flesh ; one in such a sense that they were not to have separate interests, but verily to blend their lives as when two streams mingle into one. A single cause, and only one, was sufficient to dissolve that union ; and apart from that one sin, the husband was bound to love his wife and to cherish her, even as his own body. But because of the hardness of the heart of Israel, Moses allowed a man, for certain causes not very definitely specified, to give his wife a writing of divorcement and put her away. You will find this law in Deuteronomy xxiv. 1 ; and manifestly it was, according to our Lord's view, a serious departure from the primitive idea of marriage. In point of fact, it made this sacred union, on whose absolute indissoluble sacredness so much of the well-being of society depends, little other than a provisional contract terminable by the husband, if his wife did not turn out altogether to his mind, even though she had nowise sinned against him. I do not enter into the reasons which might be urged in favour of such a law. Jesus gives but one reason, viz., the hardness of their hearts. Many have since

urged that, if people have ceased to love each other, and therefore cannot live happily together, it were better for them to separate at once and altogether. Such plausible arguments, however, the Lord utterly refuses. He asserts, in Mark x. 2, that this indulgence was not according to the original law, and that it is now withdrawn appears from His words here. For a man, under the new covenant, to give his wife a writing of divorce, was to cause her to commit adultery ; and if any one married a woman so divorced, he too was guilty of the same offence. For one cause, and for one cause only, could marriage be absolutely dissolved ; and I confess, though I do not like to assert it too strongly, yet I am disposed to think, on the whole, that He meant to say also that a woman divorced, whether for a sufficient or an insufficient cause, if she married again, was really forming an adulterous connexion. At any rate He most distinctly and unequivocally annuls the dispensation allowed by Moses in the 24th chapter of Deuteronomy, and utterly forbids any one to give his wife a writing of divorcement, holding such conduct to be an incentive to sin. For under the New Testament, marriage is a very holy union, as it was at the first ; yea, more so, for it is now a symbol of the union between the soul and its Lord, for so men ought to love their wives, even as the Lord the Church. Moreover, under the Christian system, man and woman are again placed on the very same level, as having equal rights and duties the one to the other, which was not the case in the Mosaic dispensation. There a man might give his wife

a writing of divorcement, but a like privilege did not belong to her. In Christ, however, this sacred bond can only be broken for one cause, and the rule applies equally to husband and wife. When it was said, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' the Lord taught them to understand that this Mosaic permission to divorce was so far a departure from that law, and that Judaism had authorized what the gospel forbade.

So much by way of expounding the passage ; and now, ere I close, permit me to add a few words on the general theme here discussed. Brethren, the seventh commandment, as understood by ancient Israel and by its godliest men, permitted polygamy, authorized these loose divorces, and did not apparently bring out very clearly that the sinful lust was as much forbidden as the sinful act. In the gospel it is not so. In Christ the union of one man with one wife is a very sacred and indissoluble union ; and the purity required is as much purity of heart as of conduct. But alas ! how is this high and holy law obeyed ? That Christianity has elevated the moral sense of society on this subject cannot be denied. But yet what deplorable facts exist among us who profess the name of Jesus ! I hardly dare to speak of those things which are done among us secretly and openly : the abandoned profligacy ; the brazen and bedizened courtesanship ; the ante-nuptial frailty which dishonours the marriage-bed so largely ; the sad and stricken homes from which a daughter has gone forth unto a life of shame, or which a son is forsaking for filthiest debaucheries, rioting in all vileness,

perhaps, while his mother prays in utter agony of soul for her lost one. I cannot, I dare not picture the wide-spread and loathsome misery which is produced by the violation of this law of the holy Lord. Happy homes are saddened ; happy hearts are blighted ; not a little of the grace and beauty of the land is sacrificed to the indulgence of base appetite ; and the Church of Christ is shamed by the contact and the neighbourhood of utter abominations. Brethren, I may not dwell on these sorrowful facts. I could not trust myself to speak of broken hearts crying for their once bright and joyous children, weary hearts treading the dark and joyless streets in despair, and dead souls drudging in the devil's vilest service. God almighty help them ! God all-merciful pity them ! But, beloved, as ye think of such things, and know the truth of them, oh let them bear in upon your heart deeper and ever deepening convictions of the profound truth of these words of Jesus, and a stronger and ever stronger determination to walk in the ways of the Lord. Remember that it is not the wicked deed only that is forbidden, but also the wicked lust. You will find in that word a twofold lesson of wisdom and profit to your soul. It will teach you sympathy and compassion to remember that your own heart is not so pure as that you dare to say, ' Stand aside, for I am holier than thou ;' and it will be good for you thus to feel the sad brotherhood of sin, even when you may be resisting its snares. It will teach you also to withstand the beginnings of evil, to pluck out the right eye and put it from you ; for alas ! if you do not watch

the first tendencies and uprisings of sin, you shall find it hard to resist iniquity when it comes in like a flood. But above all, remember that love is the only fulfilling of this law, as of all the rest of God's commandments. Surely, if we did but receive, in all its fulness, the good word of the Lord, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' this foul blot on our Christian civilisation would be wiped away. He that truly loved his neighbour, could not drag her into a path that inevitably led to misery and shame. It is an utter lie and devilish wickedness to apply the sacred name of love to any selfish lust and indulgence. 'Love seeketh not her own, and thinketh no evil.' He that loves in the spirit of Christ, will tender the peace, the purity, the happiness of his neighbour, and especially of those whom godless social customs are so ready to cast off into utter despair, when they slip from the way of truth and right. But the man who can look upon some fair form of blooming youth and innocent beauty, and lust after her, and wile her from a father's happy home, and from the cheerful enjoyments and assiduities of a blameless domestic life, to make her for a brief season the minister of his voluptuous appetites, by and by to cast her off to the shameless shame and horror and misery which now lie between her and an early grave; that man has a heart surely black as hell, and it will never be right with us so long as we visit with inexorable penalties the hapless victim of his selfish cruelty, while the real criminal is courted and respected even by those who are fain to call themselves Christ's pecu-

liar people. Not thus doth Jesus regard such offenders. Pure and holy He was, as never man was before or since. But the publicans and harlots were nearer the kingdom of heaven, He said, than the whited sepulchres whose social respectability covered such deliberate wickedness ; and were he now among us, the compassionate Saviour, I verily believe he would rather walk along the streets with the most wretched sinner who plies her guilty traffic there, than he would sit at table with some who circulate freely in the choicest society. Therefore let me tell you that, when it is said, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' that not only forbids the practice of such evil deeds, or the cherishing of those sinful lusts, but it also requires you to lend no countenance to those, of whatsoever station, who deliberately ensnare the innocent, or habitually work iniquity. I trust and fondly hope that such wickedness is not common among us, and oh, let me entreat you, in conclusion, who are young and thoughtless, to remember that

' Evil is wrought by want of thought,
As well as want of heart.'

Take ye good heed, then, of this good word of the Lord. How often, from causes innocent enough in themselves, ruin irretrievable is wrought among us ! For the sake of little vanities of dress and show, or for the silly ambition of holding intercourse with those above them in social status, or for the passing pleasures of an evening's excited amusement, or for many other like reasons, not very blameworthy in themselves, how many place themselves in the way of fatal temptation, and come to a

sorrowful end! Take heed. 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee.' If any such indulgence threaten your purity and simplicity with danger, resist it, refuse it, in the name of Christ. Better go in honest rags than come at last to the rags of shame. Better the poorest man's honest wife than that other thing which I may not name. Remember the word of Jesus. Stand in awe, and sin not. 'Know ye not that your bodies are the temple of God? Now the temple of God is holy, which temple are ye.'

VII.

THE LAW KEPT BY LOVE.

‘Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.’—MATT. V. 33-37.

OUR Lord continues here his illustrations of the statement that He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it; not to lessen its authority, but to exalt it; not to narrow its spirit, but to deepen and broaden it. The third commandment had said, ‘Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.’ And as a proper commentary on that law, it was written, Lev. xix. 12, ‘Ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God;’ and again in Numbers xxx. 2, ‘If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.’ Thus it had been said by them of old time, ‘Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oath.’ The Lord’s words are not an exact quotation of any part of

the ancient Scriptures. But they give, with sufficient accuracy, the meaning of several passages ; and what he proposes here to do, is to show the true spirit and meaning of this law, and how only it is really fulfilled.

And here, in the outset, let me remind you that the Jews had an exceeding, and even superstitious, reverence for the sacred name of JEHOVAH. Their lips seldom uttered it, even when reading their holy books. They commonly substituted the word *Lord* for it ; and they thought there was a kind of mystic sanctity even in its very letters. This reverence, in its proper aspect, no doubt originated in the injunction of the third commandment, which taught them never to speak of the High and Holy One, except with the solemnity which befits the creature when he alludes to the Creator of all. But the superstitious form which it finally assumed, and which shrank from using the name even on sacred occasions, was probably borrowed from the heathen customs, or, if not actually borrowed, arose from precisely the same source. Among the heathen it was common to select some particular god to be the tutelary deity of their country, under whose special protection it was placed, and whose aid they were eager to secure exclusively to themselves. Hence they were careful to conceal from all others the name of their chosen god. The people were forbidden to utter it in the hearing of strangers, or indeed to speak of it at all, except in the most secret worship of their temples. For they wanted to keep him all to themselves, and were jealous of any one else knowing or

worshipping him, lest his favours should be divided or withdrawn altogether. This was a base and degrading idea of God; yet something of the same kind would appear to have led the Jews to avoid, by all means, uttering the peculiar name of Jehovah. He was to be their God; their exclusive possession and helper. Therefore the Gentiles were to be kept in ignorance of his very name. Hence, not from any true reverence, but from a selfish superstition, when they read the Scriptures, they commonly substituted *Adonai* for Jehovah, *Lord* instead of God.

Apart from the superstition, however, the law still attached a profound solemnity to the Divine name. It was by no means to be lightly regarded, or tossed from mouth to mouth in careless flippant speech. On special occasions it was permitted to swear an oath for confirmation, as, for example, in a court of justice; and such an oath, adjuring the name of God, was most sternly binding; for he who should afterwards perjure himself would have been cut off from Israel. Only the vilest and most degraded of men, therefore, could be guilty of such an offence. So far the Jews and their Pharisee doctors all recognised the validity of that word, 'Thou shalt not forswear thyself.' But there were among them, as there are among us, many loose notions on this head nevertheless. It seems to have been thought that, although certain formal oaths were binding, so that to break them was to imperil the soul, yet there were a great many *quasi*-adjurations which by no means involved any such penalty, even should they be as lightly

broken as they were lightly taken. So have we read in old times of men of battle, who being sworn by their sword, deemed their truth and honour pledged by that oath, but for aught else, however holy, they held such bonds as lightly as Samson's withes of withered grass. So, even at present, the false and treacherous Chinese, if sworn over the fragments of a broken porcelain plate, reckons his soul to be pledged to speak the very truth ; but for any other oath, however dreadful, he esteems it no more than so much idle wind. These, no doubt, are extreme cases : but something closely akin to them seems to have prevailed among the Jews, and to have been fostered by their Pharisee teachers. Their solemn oath by the Lord God might not be broken. The man was forsworn, and to be abhorred, who took that name to witness, and did not perform his word. On that head conscience was keenly, even superstitiously alive. But while they allowed no relaxation of such a vow, they accustomed themselves to an easy, familiar, and careless use of other adjurations which were not supposed to be sacred, or to mean anything in particular, or to involve any particular obligations. Had not Joseph sworn by the life of Pharaoh to a thing which he never meant ? Why then might not an Israelite swear by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or by his own head, even though he never intended to bind himself by such an adjuration ? There was nothing sacred in these words. The commandment was not broken therefore. God's name was not taken in vain. What harm could there be in such language ? What peril to

the soul of any one ? Thus, to say the very least of it, the people learned to garnish their speech with idle and unmeaning expletives ; and what was far worse, the habit of simple truthfulness was broken ; they came to play fast and loose with their veracity ; a lie was treated as if it were no lie, and a promise as if it were no promise, and an oath as if it were no oath ; and so falsehood flourished, and conscience was debauched, and alas ! no man regarded it. This will explain then what our Lord means here when he says, ‘Swear not at all ; neither by heaven ; for it is God’s throne : nor by earth ; for it is his footstool.’ And here I observe,

1. That He does not, I think, forbid a solemn oath, such as may be required, for example, in a court of justice. The law clearly allowed such an oath for confirmation. It is said in the New Testament that for this very purpose, to give the most absolute assurance, God swore by himself, because he could swear by no greater. When the high priest adjured Jesus by the living God, Jesus found no fault with it. And therefore it seems to me the act, not of an enlightened, but of an over-scrupulous conscience, to refuse an oath in such circumstances. Those who administer these solemn adjurations, indeed, too often do so without due reverence ; for the habit of daily reiterating the same formula tends to produce a careless manner, a rapid and unsolemn mumbling of the most awful words, which is not favourable to the dread impressiveness of such an act ; and that certainly ought to be guarded against, if the value of an oath is to be upheld. But

although it is quite true that a man of genuine veracity will speak nothing but the truth, whether he be sworn or not, I can quite understand how the administration of an oath may make him doubly careful and guarded to utter only what he absolutely knows to be very fact, by calling him specially to remember that he stands in the presence of the heart-searching God and Judge of all, to whom he must render an account for every word. I do not think it necessary to discuss this particular point at greater length with you. Enough to observe that, when Jesus says, 'Swear not at all,' He follows it up, in the way of illustrating his meaning, not by adducing the solemn asseverations made in a court of justice, but by examples of those lightly-taken, lightly-broken oaths, with which men are so apt to garnish their foolish conversation. 'Swear not at all,' he says: 'neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool:' and obviously this leaves the question of more solemn adjurations perfectly free. He does not allude to them at all; but only to the flippant expletives which were and are so largely used, in such a way as to impair the perfect simplicity and veracity of men's souls. Therefore I observe,

2. That our Lord here obviously forbids all profane swearing. The Jews also, as we have seen, stoutly objected to any profane use of the peculiar name of Jehovah, and were scrupulously careful not to infringe that law. But while they would not expressly name the holy name in their light or idle conversation, they managed, for all that, to break the holy commandment,

by larding their common speech with many other oaths, swearing without cause and without meaning, by heaven, by earth, by Jerusalem, by their heads and beards, and other equally needless expletives. To this day, this kind of thing is exceedingly common in the East, and it is always accompanied with an untruthful character. Travellers assure us that the Arab chief, when most fully minded to cheat his man in a bargain, will most vociferously multiply such imprecations. And we all know that he who protests too much is pretty certain to be only covering his roguery thereby. Our Lord, therefore, goes on here to show that God's law forbids all such oaths; and this is the way he does it. He points out to them that they have no meaning except as they are related to God; that they all, in fact, imply a distinct reference to God; that everything in the nature of an oath is an adjuration of His name, so that he who sits loose to such words is just as much perjured as if he had literally taken God's name in vain. To swear by heaven, he said, was as much as to swear by the throne of God. To swear by earth, was the same as to swear by God's footstool. To swear by Jerusalem, was all one as to swear by the city of God. To swear by one's head was just to swear by Him, the living God, who made it, and who alone could make one hair white or black. Thus, every oath has a reference to Jehovah; and therefore the commandment forbids all profane swearing, whether that holy name be expressly uttered or not. Such is, in the first instance, the general drift of this passage: and let me pray you to lay it to heart,

for God 'will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain.' The custom of profane swearing, whether in the shape of round oaths, or minced oaths; the wretched habit of garnishing our common conversation with such adjurations, is at once wicked and unprofitable—a silly and a gratuitous vice. For other sins, as it has been said, one may have something to show. There may be some pleasure in them, however little profit. But in the case of the profane swearer, a man sells his soul absolutely for nought. It is the veriest wilful and wanton outrage of God's law, without advantage to the sinner himself, and most revolting to every well-constituted mind. And consider what an abuse it is of the precious gift of speech. That power was bestowed on us for noblest ends; not for banning, but for blessing. It was given for the expression of truth and wisdom, and the precious lessons which experience gathers in life's thorny paths and in the wondrous ways of God. It was given for the utterance of all gentle courtesies and kindnesses, and to gladden our days by the cheerful intercourse of friendship and love. It was given to drop balm on wounded hearts, and to bring consolation into the house of mourning. It was given for praise and prayer and all devout worship of Him who is the Author of every good gift. It was given for proclaiming the glad tidings of great joy unto all the weary and sin-burdened children of men. It is the body, as it were, in which the thoughts of the wise and good walk abroad, and we become acquainted with them and rejoice in their fellowship. And without it our

days would be sadly companionless, and our souls shut up as in the silence of a solitary prison. Is it meet, then, that a gift so precious should be desecrated to profane the name of its great Author? Should this fountain of sweet waters become a fountain of bitter waters too? Remember that the influence of habit is so great, and may be so pernicious, that, if you have once debased the good gift of the Lord to unhallowed uses, you may chance to find it little fit for its proper uses, when a day comes that you would fain turn it to better account. Bethink you that a time may come when you would gladly be able to utter words of soothing and consolation: and what, if then your tongue refuse its office, and nothing come naturally to your lips but those familiar, uncouth profanities? And a day may come when you would fain, very fain, utter a prayer at a throne of grace: and what, if your mouth, so long full of cursing, hath never a gracious word to say to the living God? And be on your guard, too, I beseech you, not only against the round oaths and more outrageous violations of this law, but also against those minced oaths and needless expletives which are all too common among us. Jesus would have us to understand here that everything in the nature of an adjuration hath an implied reference to God, and is really a taking of His name in vain. Therefore, 'Swear not at all;' neither by faith, for it is the gift of God; nor by life, for that is all one as if you said, by the life of God; nor by goodness, for that is as much as to adjure the goodness of God. It is an utterly profitless vice, a debasing of

God's good gift, without reason and without excuse. Therefore, 'Let your Yea be yea, and your Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.'

3. I apprehend that our Lord's special object here is to insist on his people practising the habit of absolute truthfulness, which will not need any oath to confirm it, and which is apt to be greatly weakened by the use of such language. An oath is taken in a court of justice, not because the witness's truth is suspected, but in order to give solemnity to his evidence, and that there may be the utmost care to speak only what for certain he knows to be the fact. But, in common conversation, were any one to ask any stronger confirmation than your simple word, that would imply some doubt of your truthfulness. In this view you can see the force of Christ's saying, that whatsoever is more than Yea or Nay, cometh of evil. If you were known to be a sincere truth-loving man, your word would be of itself sufficient. If anything more be required besides your simple affirmation, it shows that you are not walking in the blameless sincerity and veracity of the Christian life. It cometh of evil in you. But that is not all, nor by any means the worst of the matter. For the needless taking of oaths tends to loosen a man's sense of truth, and enfeeble his regard for it. That must be familiar to you all as a matter of fact, nor is it very difficult to discover the reason of it. For when any one falls into the miserable habit of larding his conversation with un-called-for adjurations, it is ten chances to one that some of them are pledged to statements that turn out not to

be strictly true. Had he simply affirmed the matter, people would have concluded that he had merely fallen into a mistake; but having sworn to it, they naturally begin to doubt his word. In order, therefore, to be believed at all, the man will require to swear harder and ever harder; and gradually his mind is turned away from the question as to the truth or untruth of the matter, and gets to think only of how by solemn asseverations he may hope to be believed. He does not think with himself what now is the very fact of the case; but he asks rather what oath can I take that will obtain credence from others? And so in the long-run it comes to pass that the truth sinks quite into the background, as altogether a secondary matter; his object being not to speak in all things what is strictly correct, but only to get people in the meanwhile to believe him. And when he has reached that stage, his progress from bad to worse, from loose and unguarded assertions to conscious and intentional lies, all backed and buttressed by most valueless oaths, becomes rapid and all but inevitable. Thus whatsoever is more than Yea and Nay, cometh of evil. It is caused by a want of honest veracity and single-hearted sincerity; and it all too surely implies a mind which is departing from the love of truth. Men who swear much by heaven or by earth do not regard such oaths as very binding; and once they have accustomed themselves to untruth in this way, bigger and rounder adjurations will be needed, and will be found equally useless, until the whole soul becomes corrupted with that worst of all rottenness, an utterly lying spirit.

Brethren, allow me to urge this matter home upon you with all earnestness for a little. We in this country speak much *about the truth*, and we are doubtless exceeding fond of it, and very properly so. But the truth, which is so highly valued by us, is the outward revealed truth of God, the word and doctrine of grace. Well, it is all well to love and esteem that most highly; it is quite impossible to value it beyond its exceeding worth; and it will be a sad day for our dear country when it is held less precious than it is. But there is another truth which also Christians have to consider seriously—truth in the inward parts, simple single-eyed veracity, which is one of the noblest fruits of our renewing faith. And I beseech you to pause and think whether that holds so high a place in our regard as surely beseems its godlike character. Is our Yea or Nay of such unstained sincerity that it needs no other confirmation, and would not be strengthened by it? Have we gotten the Christian character for utter truthfulness which can only be earned by unchanging, untainted veracity? If you are dealing and trafficking in the market with some one who is known for his zeal in behalf of the truth, does your experience constrain you to feel that his word in matters of trade may be relied on as absolute truth? If you are transacting with some one who is among the foremost perhaps in maintaining sound opinion, do you feel perfectly confident that his every word will be spoken in frank and guileless sincerity? I put the matter thus to you, leaving it to the decision of your actual experience; but having,

for my own part, a sorrowful conviction that a love for *the truth* may co-exist with a woful disregard of *truthfulness*. Now, brethren, without under-estimating the worth of true and sound views, I want you, as Christians, also to adorn the gospel of Christ by the unfeigned truth of your lips. There is nothing more diabolic than a lie, for he is the father of lies; there is nothing baser on earth than mean equivocation and half-truths which are meant to deceive; there is nothing, in the long-run, that so rots out the right heart of a man, as to speak the thing that is not, to palter with the sacred verity. Of all the attributes of God, there is none to which the believing soul clings with more tenacity, or in which he finds greater comfort, than in God's unstained veracity, his true and faithful word. Good it is to think of his long-suffering patience; sweet it is to call to mind his ever-mindful goodness; cheering it is to remember his unsearchable mercies; and it is ever most inspiring to dwell on his tender loving-kindness; but not less precious is the thought of his truth, whereby we have assurance that all his exceeding great and precious promises shall be fulfilled. He that would be truly perfect, then, as the Father which is in heaven is perfect, will give himself with all diligence to practise truth in every thought and word and act, so that his Yea should be like God's, not Yea and then Nay, but ever Yea and Amen. The poor barbarian utters lies by the bushel, and only laughs when he is found out; the civilized heathen lies with deliberation and circum-

stance, cunningly patching his untruths into a likeness of fact. But nothing more decisively indicates the presence of a true Christian spirit than its guileless simplicity, its utter abhorrence of all lying and craftiness and mean equivocation. Oh, brethren, let it not be so with you. Remember that a lie is the surest means of affiliating you, not with the God of glory, but with the father of lies. Set a watch then before your lips; keep the door of your mouth; guard every outlet against falsehood in every shape; and pray God to give you truth in the inward parts. And as one important means for this end, avoid all needless oaths, round or minced; and let your object be not so much to be believed as to speak always and in all things the very truth as ye know it. For wanton adjurations tend surely in the long-run to loosen the bonds of veracity; and there is no man so likely to be an utter liar as he who is perpetually swearing and asseverating his truth without cause. 'Wherefore let your Yea be yea, and your Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.'

The sum of the whole matter then is this—'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,' which certainly implies in the first instance, 'Thou shalt not forswear thyself.' But the spirit of the commandment is far broader than that. It does not merely imply that God will not hold him guiltless who deliberately perjures his own soul. That were a narrow restriction of its meaning, worthy only of the Scribes and Pharisees. But in its full and proper spirit it forbids

all the idle expletives and minced oaths of common conversation, both because they have an implied reference to God, and do really profane his name, and also because their tendency is to relax the sense of truth ; for ‘whatsoever is more than Yea and Nay cometh of evil.’ And hence the true obedience of this law is only attained by him who, feeling himself ever in the presence and under the eye of the heart-searching God, strives in every act and look and word to be perfectly honest and true. For no lie is of the truth, brethren ; but every lie of every kind,—the lie downright, the lie of equivocation, the lie of insinuation, the lie of silence, the lie of look or manner,—every attempt to deceive, is to dishonour the name of Him who is faithful and true and right. And if ye love Him, ye will love his holy name too well to associate it in any way with that which is false ; and if ye love your brethren, as Christ hath loved you, ye will be careful to use God’s good gift of speech not to familiarize his ears with profanity, or to deceive him with falsehoods, but always reverently to speak the truth in Love.

VIII.

THE LAW KEPT BY LOVE.

'Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee; and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.'—MATT. v. 38-42.

IN Exodus xxi. 24, it had been said that the criminal guilty of certain offences should give 'life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.' Again, in Leviticus xxiv. 19, 20, it was added, 'If a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so should it be done to him again.' Such was the law of Israel as laid down by Moses, the servant of the Lord. How far it was carried out into strict literal fulfilment, it is not very easy to say. In the East, the sense of justice is somewhat prone to gratify itself by such inflictions. To maim the body is not an operation from which they shrink so instinctively as we do. Pos-

sibly therefore the brawler really had his own teeth drawn, or his hand cut off, or his eye plucked from its socket, in recompense for like injuries done to his neighbour, though certainly it is not necessary to assume that the law was always thus rigidly carried out to the letter. Neither, I may add, was the person injured anywhere compelled to demand redress after this fashion. It was obligatory on the judges to inflict the penalty when the guilt of the party was proved; but it was not obligatory on the man who had been hurt to insist on the punishment of the evil-doer. Doubtless he might forgive him; might forego his own vengeance; and in so doing he would have been acting in accordance with the word which said, 'Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' This law, then, was not necessarily carried out in the strict letter of its terms, neither did it bind the injured party always to demand the stern infliction of its sentence; but it laid down an absolute rule for the judge, according to which he must administer justice in Israel.

The principle, and it is a principle of no little importance in its own place,—the principle involved here is that there should be, as far as possible, a just proportion between the offence and the punishment, that the penalty to be inflicted should neither be too light nor too severe; but that the one should be a fair equivalent for the other. In the case of murder, for example, the sentence was to be literally death; life for life: 'Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall

his blood be shed.' In other cases, a fine might perhaps be justly considered an equivalent punishment. And the scale of penalties might vary according to what men would feel to be a deprivation and a loss ; only, in all cases, they must be regulated by a strict sense of justice, avoiding undue severity as well as injurious lenity. Thus, if a rich man had committed a breach on his neighbour, this law, I think, would hardly have been satisfied with a trifling fine, for that was no sufficient infliction on one who had enough and to spare, and to whom the loss of a shekel of silver was of no moment. Or if a poor man had stolen his neighbour's goods, this law certainly would not have justified the judge in putting him to death, for that was a far greater punishment than he had deserved. The principle that must guide all the decisions in such cases was that of rigid justice, neither more nor less, as represented by the words, 'An eye for an eye.' In the practical working out of this, no doubt, there was room for the exercise of a wise discretion, and there was also possibility of mistake. But I am fully persuaded that it is only by steadfastly keeping this principle in view, and trying honestly to adjust the penalty to the offence, that our administration of criminal law can be preserved from a dangerous leniency or a cruel severity. And before leaving this point, I may add, in conclusion, that I believe our national statute-book would never have been disgraced by many of its bloody and unwise enactments, had this good and sound principle been remembered. But for a period our legislators were carried away by

metaphysical ideas of the nature and object of penal inflictions. At one time they held that a criminal was required to suffer only for the good of society, and to be a warning to others ; and the result of this notion was most cruel, for, not being regulated by the strict law of justice, human life was taken for stealing a sheep, or forging a signature, or for uttering opinions which the ruling powers disliked. By and by, the pendulum swung to the opposite extreme,—the sentiment of compassion seized hold of the theory that all punishment was purely or mainly for the good of the criminal himself ; and the result was most unfortunate, for the worst part of society was coddled and taken care of, and made far more comfortable than its honest poor. In both cases the effect on men's minds was altogether pernicious ; for undue severity produced recklessness, and undue leniency wrought indifference, and crime of all kinds multiplied and throve. The doctrine of our text, rightly understood, is the only true guide to wise penal legislation. Let us be guided by the principle of justice. Let there be an honest attempt to approximate the severity of punishment to the greatness of the offence. We may have to adopt diverse expedients for this end ; but at any rate let our effort be to act on the rule, that no more than an eye should be demanded for an eye, and no less than a tooth for a tooth ; that, in short, the penalty should be as near as possible equivalent for the crime,—neither so lenient that men will make light of it, nor yet so severe as to be a real injustice and wrong.

But while thus granting to the full the exceeding wisdom of the Mosaic law on this head, I must add that even in this its judicial aspect, it by no means comes up to the requirements of the gospel. There is indeed nothing more beautiful than justice, and nothing more divine. The judge sitting without bias and without wrath, with clear, unclouded vision searching out the truth, and with calm judgment administering righteousness, is a true image of God; and nothing is more grateful to heaven than his work, nor is anything more wholesome for men. But Christian men, Christian society, Christian legislators, have other duties even to the criminal population, besides punishing their offences. It is not enough for the judge to require an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. It is not enough just to administer righteous judgment, taking care that there shall neither be undue severity nor undue leniency in the sentence. We have not done our duty even to the most wilful and wayward and wicked of our brethren, when we have exacted from them the uttermost farthing, and yet no more than the uttermost farthing, of their debt. The Lord's counsel to those who are smitten, that they should turn the other cheek, and to those who are robbed of a coat, that they should add the cloak to it also, though expressed in language strongly figurative, has meaning and relation also even in respect of these judicial procedures. For we are not working righteousness unless we mingle it with mercy. We have not done all our duty to the thief when we put him in jail, and give him hard work

and hard fare. We have not done full justice to the murderer when we rear a gallows for him, and ordain him to be hanged some morning in the face of the sun and the day. Christianity has bowels and mercies for all; and the mercy is as much a part of what is just and due as the penalty is. It may be necessary—it is necessary—to inflict punishment on the wrong-doer; but it is equally necessary to put away all wrath and revenge, and go to him in the spirit of brotherly love, and heap also coals of fire on his head, to turn him, if possible, to better thoughts and better ways. I recognise fully the justice and the wisdom of punishment for offences done; but I also recognise as equally obligatory that justice demands the putting forth of every effort to amend the criminal, to do him good, to enlighten his mind, and to change his character. Therefore, even in the mere judicial aspect of this question, the old law is not the full Christian law; the eye for an eye is not enough, without the forgiving and merciful spirit, which seeks the good of the offender even more than his punishment. We have not done our duty even to the vilest criminal, when we merely visit him with condign punishment, however measured and adjusted by the strictest sense of righteousness; unless we also blend our severity with mercy, with kindness, with all charitable consideration and helpfulness, as far as is consistent with the high ends of justice. For all this, however, no provision was made in the Mosaic law; nor was there anything in the spirit of it which seemed to require such conduct. But under the gospel,

justice is only perfected in the spirit of mercy, even as the Psalmist sang of the living God : ‘ Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy ; for Thou renderest to every one according to his works.’ But now,

2. For the right understanding of what our Lord says here, it must be remembered, that while this law properly belonged to the judicial procedure of Israel, it was often applied by the people as a rule of private conduct. As a rule of judicial procedure, we have seen that it was, and still is, and with certain modifications must always be, obligatory. Jesus never meant to say that a man accused of smiting his neighbour was to receive for sentence a right to smite him again ; or that one who sued for his neighbour’s coat was to get liberty to take his cloak also. That would have been to pervert judgment, and to turn righteousness into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood. As a principle of public justice, the law of Moses remained in all its force. But it had become among the Jews a rule of private revenge. There was nothing akin to our public prosecutor among them. The duty of prosecuting rested on the injured party. And being entitled to demand strict justice at law, he naturally enough carried the idea into the morality of private life, and fostering the spirit of wrath, he deemed himself to be obeying the law when he sought to repay evil with evil, instead of trying to overcome evil with good. This idea, in a partially organized state of society such as existed during the greater part of Jewish history, inevitably became a root of great bitterness. For revenge has no

moderation, and waits to hear no evidence. When the law is taken into private hands justice is forgotten, passion bears down all before it, an insult is visited as if it were a crime, might gets the better of right, feuds are handed down from father to son, making blood-thirstiness a duty; and the worst passions of our nature are not only cherished, but appear to be sanctioned by the most sacred obligations; so that really it is hardly possible to conceive of a worse or more fatally mischievous spirit getting a hold of private society than that which is the very law of judicial procedure,—an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. To overthrow this spirit, then, Jesus takes up his position here, ‘I say unto you, Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.’

Does He then altogether, and in all circumstances, forbid a law-plea, however unjust and wicked the conduct of the offender may be? Does He deny to his people the right to resist oppression, however criminal and illegal the usage they are receiving? Does He require us absolutely to give to all who ask, and lend to all who would borrow, whatever our own condition is, and however little it might be for the good of those who seek it? He says that we are not to resist evil; that we are to submit to wrong and injury which may be done to us. Does He then mean that, under all circumstances, we are bound to give way, and to allow the wickedness of men to triumph without check or restraint? That is the way in which his words have been sometimes read. Nay, the principle of non-

resistance has been occasionally carried so far as to make the gospel appear to lend its sanction to every enormity of oppressive government. Let us see, then, how far such an idea is borne out by these remarkable paradoxical sayings of our Lord.

You will remember, then, that he is dealing, in general, with the principle of private revenge, which he is anxious to destroy, because it is most fatal at once to the spiritual and social life of men. But, as usual, he goes for this purpose down into principles of moral duty, which lie far deeper than the precise question on hand; because his object is not merely to prevent a certain evil from being done, but to implant another spirit altogether in our hearts. It is not enough, with his views of God's law, just to tell his followers that they were not to demand an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth; and that, in particular, they were not to take justice into their own hands. A mere negation of that sort would not have served his purpose. He wanted to cast out of them a certain evil spirit; but he could only do so by putting a better spirit in its room.

Therefore he tells them that they are not only not to avenge themselves, but that they are not even to resist evil, but rather to overcome evil with good. And then he goes on to illustrate this in four different cases. First, he adduces the injuries that may be done to one's person, regarding which the so-called laws of honour have always and everywhere inculcated not only the justice, but the very obligation to seek revenge. If thine enemy smite thee on the cheek, men had said,

you may not only return the blow, but your honour is tainted until you demand satisfaction; and it was commonly thought that nothing but blood could wipe that stain away. But Jesus says, 'Nay; rather turn the other cheek also to him. Revenge is human; but mercy is divine. If you repay evil with evil, you are only making two evils in the world instead of one. If thine enemy is wicked, why should you grieve the Lord by showing a kindred spirit? Best to endure the insult, for evil is never overcome with evil. Commit thyself to Him who judgeth righteously.' In the second example, He forbids a litigious spirit as decidedly as a revengeful one. The Jewish dress consisted essentially of two garments,—a coat or boddice, and a cloak or loose robe flung over the other. This last was also used as a blanket during the night, and, according to the law, though it were pledged, it must be returned when night came on. To sue a man for his body-garment of course betrayed a hard, exacting spirit; for that was as much as to wish to strip him of the only clothes in which he could do his daily work. But rather than fall into litigious strife, Jesus counselled his followers to let the night-raiment go with the day one; for it were better for them to suffer almost any loss of bodily comfort than to get into litigation, with its bitterness and vexation and delay and disappointment, so apt to engross all our thoughts, and to sour the whole spirit. If thy neighbour sue thee for thy coat, it is not a neighbourly or a brotherly thing; but rather than be involved in the misery of lawsuits, with

their crops and after-crops of ill-will, let him have coat and cloak too; and when he has stript thee naked, he may begin to relent. Anyhow, commit thyself to Him who judgeth righteously. In the third and fourth examples, He seems to me to refer to oppressive acts of government, felt to be galling, but to which he still counsels submission; for Jesus would render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, would obey all lawful authorities, unless they required actual participation in wrong-doing. Thus it was a part of the system of government in the East, that a post riding on royal errands, or indeed any one having the firman of government, when journeying through the land, could demand, at certain stations, horses and men to carry him on his way. This was felt, and still is felt, in those countries to be a sore grievance. The horse may be in the plough, and every moment precious to the farmer, but when the order is exhibited, he must carry the traveller the appointed stage on his journey, at whatever loss or suffering to himself. Certainly it is an oppressive, really a stupidly oppressive arrangement; but though the Lord nowise justified it, he says that it were better to convey the traveller twice the distance than to fall a-quarrelling about it. It is wrong in men to require this service; but there is no wrong in your yielding it, and as long as you are not required to *do* evil, it is best for you to submit to any evil almost that may be done to you. So it is also in regard to the loans and gifts they may demand from you. For the last illustration, 'Give to him that asketh of you, and from him that

would borrow of you turn not thou away,' refers, I think, to the same kind of oppression. Jesus, you perceive, is explaining the principle that we should not resist evil or injury done to us. But if a poor man begs our help, he is not doing us any wrong. Or if a poor friend in difficulty would fain borrow from our purse, he too is nowise injuring us. Common begging or borrowing, however mistaken, however injurious to the party concerned, is not a matter of wrong-doing to us, and is not therefore to the point. But it was, and is a frequent custom with oppressive governments, when they have exhausted all fair means of taxation, to ask from their subjects a gift or a loan, and such asking is equivalent to a command. Peaceable subjects have been often troubled to know what to do in such cases. And as a general rule, the Lord says to Christians here, when these enforced gifts and loans are required, though they be undoubtedly evil, 'Better pay them, better suffer injury than identify the gospel of the kingdom with what might seem to be a spirit of political disaffection—from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.' Such is the general drift of this passage. It inculcates a spirit of meek submission, instead of revenge and the assertion of our own rights. It teaches us not to return evil for evil, but rather to overcome evil with good.

Now, there are a great many questions which might be raised on the portion of Scripture thus expounded, questions which could not be settled exactly on any grounds of abstract principle, but which would require

to be dealt with one by one, or else must be left to the discretion of Christian wisdom. Thus, for example, it might be asked, 'Am I, as a follower of Jesus, to allow my home to be invaded, my women and children to be destroyed by wicked men, and never to put forth one effort of honest manhood for their protection? And if not, at what point is endurance to stop, and resistance to begin? Am I bound to allow wrong, under the guise of law, to strip me of all that is necessary for work and the maintenance of those dependent on me? And if not, when does meekness cease to be right, and litigation cease to be a sin? Am I required, for Christ's sake, to yield to every encroachment of political oppression, and to homologate, by my subserviency, the wayward, wanton exercise of power, in violation, not of my rights only, but of those of all my brethren? Does Christianity teach a doctrine of slavish obedience, by which man's nobler nature is debased, and society in the long-run utterly corrupted? And if not, at what stage does the duty of non-resistance give place to the higher duty of standing by what is right and true and just, be the issue what it may?' These are questions which people can hardly avoid asking; and it is not only difficult, it is utterly impossible, to give a definite categorical reply which will apply to every case alike. I am very desirous that you should understand this clearly. Possibly a time may come when, one after another, all the difficulties of this kind shall have been discussed and determined to the satisfaction of every right-hearted man. I don't know. It may be.

But certainly at present we have not reached that point ; and all I can say is, that the law of the new life which is in Christ Jesus has been left largely to the action of its own self-directing powers in the interpretation of this as of various other matters. This much, however, is clear enough : as a general rule it is wrong to return evil for evil. It is wrong to cherish a revengeful spirit ; it is wrong to foster a litigious spirit ; it is wrong to give place to a rebellious spirit ; we ought not to demand eagerly an eye for an eye when we suffer personal injury or wrong ; we ought not to rush into law-pleas, with their bitter and vexatious results on the mind, merely because we are injured ; and we ought not to plunge into political antagonism merely because we are made the victims of a wicked and oppressive system of government. So much at least is clear, that our spirit as Christians is to be a peaceable spirit, willing to endure unto the verge of what is right, not revengeful, not contentious, not self-asserting, but meek and lowly and patient of all personal wrong. A detailed and specific rule for your conduct in every case I cannot give. With growing light the path of duty will grow clear. There is in you a spirit of life which must be your main guide, not any regulations which I can easily state. Christianity lays down principles rather than precepts for our guidance. Only always bear this in mind, that you are called to be like Jesus, who was meek and lowly, and who ‘ when He was reviled, reviled not again ; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed himself to

Him that judgeth righteously.' That is the only principle that will really and rightly guide you in all circumstances in which you may be placed. Let that spirit dwell in you, and control you; and when exceptional cases arise, seeming to demand a different line of conduct, pray God to direct you, so that even in resisting evil you may still show forth the spirit of Jesus. No doubt, it may be hard, it is hard, to act out this idea. But be assured of it that it is a nobler work, and a higher triumph to overcome yourself than to overcome your enemy. And besides, evil is never overcome with evil, but only with good. Your fire will not put out your neighbour's; rather they will combine and make a double conflagration, his wrong and your wrath together vexing the world. Wherefore see that ye 'resist not evil,' but take up your cross and follow the Lamb, 'for so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully; and even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps.'

IX.

THE LAW KEPT BY LOVE.

'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.'—
MATT. v. 43-48.

It should seem that the Scribes taught the Jews to believe that God's law enjoined them 'to love their neighbour, and to hate their enemy.' But there is no such word in all the ancient Scriptures. You will search the Bible for it in vain. The first part of the saying indeed you may find; 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour,' was enjoined once and again; but it is nowhere added, 'Thou shalt hate thine enemy.' The Canaanites were to be cut off; and there was to be no peace with Amalek; and doubtless the Lord had good satisfactory reasons both for inflicting these stern judgments, and for using Israel as the instrument to accomplish His

design. But He never laid down a general principle such as this, which would have been quite alien to the whole spirit of his law, and which, moreover, would have lent the sanction of Divine approval to that spirit of wrath and bitterness which is already hard enough to restrain. The Jews had a great power of hating their enemies without being commanded to do so. This reference, then, to what had been 'said by them of old time' is unlike the others adduced by Jesus in this passage, for they all may be really found in Scripture, though their true spirit was misrepresented by the Scribes. But this case is an example of what our Lord elsewhere lays to their charge, 'that they taught for doctrine the traditions of men, so making the commandments of God of none effect.'

Sad it is to think that those men to whom were committed the oracles of God should have made unauthorized additions to his sacred precepts, or subjoined glosses like this, which altogether changed the spirit and character of the law. I do not suppose that they actually asserted that any such word was to be found in Scripture. They were very careful of the letter of revelation; scrupulously nice and exact in keeping that intact; for which we are thankful to them, as it gives us assurance that the stream of the inspired testimony has come down to us in comparative purity, unmingled with those traditions which made the commandment of none effect. But being enjoined to love their neighbours, they esteemed it a good and valid deduction from this that they might hate their enemies, and then by and

by that they ought to hate them. And I apprehend we may learn a lesson of caution here, not to be ready to claim for our own supposed necessary conclusions the same authority as belongs to God's explicit commands. These acute and subtle scribes were no dull reasoners. They were probably as cunning logicians as most of us. But their minds were for all that far from the mind of God, and consequently never was anything more alien from the command 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour,' than the unhappy deduction, 'Thou shalt therefore hate thine enemy.' And this was soon apparent in the result to which it led. For ere long, and most naturally, questions of casuistry began to be agitated. Men began to ask, 'Who is my neighbour whom I am bound to love? And who is mine enemy that I am free to hate?' And while ample scope was provided for the free exercise of hatred, the region in which love was to reign was ere long narrowed to a span. For first of all, they determined that the whole heathen world were not to be viewed as neighbours, but as enemies; them, therefore, they regarded with a proud contempt or a cordial hate. One might have fancied that such a field was wide enough for wrath to range in. But the spirit of evil is not easily satisfied. The fire once begun will spare nothing in the end. Besides the heathen, there were heretics in Samaria; men who worshipped the God of Abraham, but not in Jerusalem or on Mount Zion. The Samaritans, therefore, were not to be treated as neighbours; no love was due to them. Nay, but further, as bigotry always finds it more difficult to endure

a heretic than to have mercy on a heathen, therefore a special intensity of hate was reserved for the separatists who worshipped God on Mount Gerizim. Moreover, besides those religious and national enmities, there were of course many cases of a private kind which still further excluded men from all rights of loving neighbourhood. If my brother cursed me, or spited me, or persecuted me, was he still to be called my neighbour? Had I any debt of love to the very man who wronged me? Once let in the idea that one is free to hate his enemy, and such questions as these will inevitably arise, narrowing more and more the domain of brotherly love, until gradually the principle of intense selfishness shall absorb and engross the whole soul, and we come, as those Jews came, to think that we are required only to love those who love us, and to do good only to those who do good to us. So was the law of God narrowed, and made of none effect through this tradition.

Against this spirit, therefore, the Lord entered his solemn protest, laying down the true Divine law with its true Divine commentary: 'I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.'

You will observe here that our Lord does not say that all men are to be equally dear to us, or equally esteemed by us. He does not substitute a vague principle of universal philanthropy in the room of those special affections which arise either out of kindred or

kindness. Neither does he teach us to show equal honour to the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. There is still, no doubt, a peculiar love of family and country, different from what is due to the general world ; and Christ finds no fault with that, but only denies that love should be limited by ties of blood or name. There is still, no doubt, a special feeling of gratitude for kindness received, which every right-minded man will cherish ; and Jesus finds no fault with that, but only asserts that goodwill is not to be restricted to those who do us good. There is still, no doubt, a singular affection among those who are brethren in the household of faith, and a singular respect due to the upright man of God ; and Christ finds no fault with that, but only teaches us that love should embrace the enemies of our faith as well as the enemies of our persons, and show kindness to the wicked as well as to the good. What he means, in short, is to assert in all its fulness the law of God, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour,' and to deny in all its application the corollary of the Scribes, 'Thou shalt hate thine enemy.' He forbids hate altogether, and will not allow it any rightful place in our hearts. He would have us to understand that God is love, and that he only who dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and He in him.

This principle He illustrates in several distinct commands, all of them certainly hard for flesh and blood to obey ; but all of them essentially necessary for the life of faith, the life which is in God. On another occasion he answered the question, 'Who is my neighbour?'

by a parable of rare beauty and significance, which illustrates almost to the letter the various injunctions given here. Some one—a scribe, a lawyer—familiar with the ensnaring casuistry of the Rabbis, put that question to him, thinking to catch him unawares, and entangle him in the miserable sophistries which had so woefully enfeebled the Divine law. And in reply Jesus told him the story of a Jew who was going down from Jerusalem to Samaria. On the way he fell among the thieves who haunted that road then as now, and was robbed and wounded, and left half dead. By and by a Levite came up, and would not see a neighbour even in his Jewish brother, and crossed to the other side. Then a priest drew near, and looked on him; but as the man had never done him any good turn, he did not see that he had any claim upon him. These two had well learnt the lesson of selfishness, only to love those who loved them, and to benefit those by whom they had profited, or by whom they might hope to profit. The law of the Scribes had effectually rotted the heart out of them. So they looked on a suffering brother, and passed on, as if it were no concern of theirs. Ere long a Samaritan came along the road, and he also looked, and saw the Jew lying there naked and wounded. Now, here lies the whole point and force of the story. The Jews hated a Samaritan. As one of a rival people who occupied the land of promise, the Jews cursed a Samaritan, as a dog who had and could have no part in the covenant, living in the house, but not being of the seed of Abraham. The Jews persecuted

and spited a Samaritan as a heretic who worshipped God in the wrong place, and in quite a wrong way. If, then, it was the law of God that a man should love his neighbour and hate his enemy, this Samaritan merchant had abundant reasons for passing the poor Jew, as the priest and the Levite had done. But instead of that, he bound up his wounds, and poured oil upon them, and put him on his beast, and trudged by his side to the nearest inn or caravanseraï, and there had him housed and cared for, and finally paid for his keep till he might be able to go again on his journey. Whereupon the Lord asked the very pertinent question, 'Which of these now, Levite, priest, or Samaritan, was neighbour to him that fell among the thieves? Which of them did his brotherly duty? Which of them obeyed the law of the Lord?' And, as usual, they were tongue-tied, and knew not what to say. For with this simple and beautiful story he had cut in sunder all their casuistical entanglements, and flashed into the heart of those cobwebs a light of divinest and most searching truth, in whose presence they were ashamed and confounded.

Now, this wonderfully simple and effective parable clears up in a moment the whole matter before us. For it teaches us that the offices of neighbourly love are nowise dependent either on the character of him who claims them, or on his treatment of us. It is in a sense natural to hate our enemies; but it is only natural because our better nature has been miserably changed and corrupted. It is the instinct not of true, but of fallen humanity, to burn with wrath, and return evil

for evil. It may be hard then to obey our Lord's injunctions here. It is no doubt hard for corrupted flesh and blood; but it is only in the denying and crucifying of that sinful nature that we can attain to fellowship with God. Therefore, Jesus says to us, 'Love your enemies. Though a man has not shown, and does not now show, a friendly spirit to you, that is no reason why you should not do a friendly turn to him; still less will it justify the indulgence in a similar enmity. If he curse you, do not curse him in return, but rather bless him with a true and kindly heart. If he hate you, do not hate him, but rather do him good; for to let hate into your heart will only embitter it, and verily will not anywise better your affairs. If he spite and persecute you, perhaps you may have no other opportunity to return good for evil, but always, and at the worst, you can at least pray for him. Poor man! his enmity, his hate, his cursing, his persecution, are, to say the least, as injurious to himself as they can possibly be to you; he is, if you would understand him truly, a fit object for exceeding pity,—one for whom you could do no better turn than to pray, "Father, forgive him, for he knows not what he does." And if you do not—if you copy his example and give way to his spirit,—if you too yield yourself up to enmity and cursing and hate and spite and persecution, I see nothing fitter for your state than just to take up the same prayer, and cry, "Father, forgive him, for he knows not what manner of spirit he is of." ' I grant that it is hard to meet with harsh, unfriendly dealing from anybody, and specially

hard, when it is done by those from whom you had expected other things, as brethren in the Lord. And it is hard to find the cruel weapon of a malicious tongue either rudely cursing your name, or insidiously poisoning your reputation. And it is hard for one who is reaching forth after loving sympathy to meet only with a cold hate, like ice, chilling all his kindly affections. And it is exceeding hard to endure persecution when conscious of righteousness and integrity and truth in the inward parts. Not a doubt of it; to frail human nature these injunctions of Christ's are among the most difficult he could possibly have laid down. The tradition of the Scribes was an easy and comfortable one,—to love a neighbour, and to hate an enemy; but it was an emphatic cross to ask us to love our neighbour, and to reckon our worst enemy still to be our neighbour. That, however, is clearly the law of the Lord, and nothing less than that. That is the law of perfection—the law of the divine life—the law of the living God. Love, pure and holy, must rise and triumph above enmities, curses, hatreds, persecutions, and clasp in its goodwill all, whatever their character or conduct to us, doing good to them as it has opportunity, and when it can nought else, at any rate praying for them. Thus the Lord claims for every man the right of a neighbour,—the right to be loved,—or, at any rate, he imposes on all his brethren this duty, that whether others deserve it or not, they at least shall never cease to love them. 'See that ye repay not evil for evil, but rather overcome evil with good; for verily the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.'

And now, in conclusion, observe the reason He gives for this law. It is that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; and that ye may be perfect, as your Father is perfect. This is the spirit of Christian perfection, for love is the fulfilling of the law. This is the spirit of the Lord, for God himself is love. The children of this world love those who do good to them. The very publicans did that, and all Israel held them to be sons of Belial nevertheless. The children of this world saluted their brethren, and were courteous and kind to them. So did the publicans, and small thanks to them. It is easy to love those who love you. But the children of the kingdom must live by a higher law. They must be 'like their Father in heaven, who causeth his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust.' Now, by these words I do not understand the Lord to mean that God treats all men alike, and regards all with equal favour, making no difference between Israel and Egypt—between the Christian and the Christless,—between those who believe, and those who despise him. That is not the case. There is, unquestionably, an immense and quite incalculable distinction drawn between these two classes; and the feelings with which the Father views them are as diverse as could well be imagined. The Lord is angry with the wicked. They provoke him by their sins, and their hard, heartless unbelief, to a most righteous indignation. And, on the other hand, there is a love wherewith He regardeth his own, drawing them to himself with fond caresses and

everlasting kindnesses; a love of unspeakable tenderness and faithfulness and watchful care, transcending a mother's affection for her first-born child. The Lord would not have us for a moment to think that the everlasting Father acknowledges no difference between the just and the unjust, the evil and the good. So far as their outward lot is concerned, there may be—there often is—no apparent distinction drawn; yea, the troubles that afflict the just are frequently more numerous and hard to bear than commonly fall to the men of the world. But then, underneath all the severity of their external life, there are fountains of living water springing up in them—graces, helps, consolations, joys unspeakable and full of glory,—which give to them assurance of God's very special kindness, and are an ample compensation for all the ills they have to bear. Thus the righteous God has his own way of manifesting a peculiar love to his peculiar people. And if the Lord would not have us to think that the heavenly Father recognises no difference between the evil and the good, neither does he mean to say that that distinction will not one day be manifested in the decisions of a most righteous judgment. He does not at present cause his sun to shine on Mount Zion, and to darken over Gerizim. He does not as yet water with tender rain the pastures of His flock, and blight and wither the corn-fields of the wicked. This is not the time when judgment is done, yet such a time, nevertheless, shall verily come, when God shall judge the poor with righteousness, and his people with

equity, making most solemn and abiding separation between the sheep and the goats, between the evil and the good.

Still while that is all true, and all to be faithfully remembered, let it also never be forgotten that Jesus requires us here to love even our enemies, in order that we may be the children of our Father which is in heaven. For though there is a peculiar love which clasps in a fond embrace the chosen, redeemed, and believing ones, there is also in God's heart a most pitiful, yearning, compassionate love, which does good to all, striving to make them good. It is the very perfection of the Father's nature that he does not hate any, but loves all his creatures. You are a parent, and you have perhaps an unhappy prodigal among your children; he has disobeyed you; he has been cruelly selfish to you; he has wounded you in your quickest, keenest sensibilities. And, alas! he has gone an evil, ruinous way, too, for himself. You cannot approve of him as of the well-behaved part of the household. You cannot feel the same pleasure in him as you do in them. There is a great difference, then, in the feelings you entertain for him and those with which you cherish your dutiful and affectionate children. Yet for all that, he is still your child, all unlike a true child as he is. You cannot but be angry with him, and yet you cannot hate him. You cannot but be grieved with him, and yet you cannot cease to love him. You cannot further his wrong-doing, and yet you cannot but try to do him good. Thus your sun shines on him as well

as on the others ; and you would not regard any one of your children who hated their erring brother as a true child of yours, because that were departing from the whole spirit of your life. Now, this analogy of the Lord's beautiful parable goes into the very heart and marrow of divine truth. For God is even such a Father who cannot approve of sinners, cannot feel for them as he does for his faithful ones, cannot but be indignant at their selfish and cruel waywardness, and yet cannot cease to pity and love them ; and will not regard us as his true children, unless we also partake of the same spirit. Therefore Jesus says to us here, 'Love your enemies, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.' I beseech you, brethren, to receive this truth in all its fulness. Let nothing whatever turn you from love to hate. Let no kind of plea or subterfuge get that a lodgment in your mind. For be what it may, it is false to the spirit of your Father in heaven. Ah ! people sometimes persuade themselves that while they should love their own enemies, they ought to hate those who are enemies of God ; and no sooner does this idea get a footing in their thoughts than it spreads and extends its domain, and, under covert of a pious duty, all malice, hate, and uncharitableness riot in their deceitful hearts. But the Lord's word is most absolute, and without qualification. Love is due to all, good and evil, just and unjust, saint and sinner, heathen and heretic, godly and godless ; for our duty does not depend on theirs, neither is our spirit to be regulated by theirs ; but all we think and do and feel is to be

ordered by this, let us be the true children of our Father in heaven, who causeth his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and his rain to fall on the just and on the unjust.

I cannot conclude this discourse, and this part of the Sermon on the Mount, without one further observation. It has often been said that what is called, by way of pre-eminence, the gospel, is hardly to be found in this sermon of our Lord's. It seems all concerned with law, unfolding its true meaning, explaining its real spirit, magnifying the law and making it honourable; but scarcely uttering a word which the sinner can lay hold of as God's good news to his soul. And certainly, in the poor, meagre, formal sense of that word, as it has been sometimes used, there does not seem to be much gospel here. Yet he would miserably mistake and misunderstand the Lord Jesus, who should therefore conclude either that this word of Christ's was without the good news, or that the gospel was a kind of afterthought—a doctrine which grew up in later times, and did not belong to the roots and essential ideas of Christianity. For while there is no specific and formal expression of it here, it is all implied, and all runs through the strain of our Lord's sermon, as an undertone essential to its harmony, fulness, and power. And in the word now before us, it crops up in a way which only wilful blindness could possibly overlook. For though it be true that, in his general providence, God makes his sun to shine on the evil as well as the good, and his rain to fall on the just

and on the unjust, and so far the specific doctrine of love is vindicated; yet no one can well read those words with the purged eyesight of evangelical understanding, without carrying the idea further still, and remembering the special manifestation of the Father's love in Jesus. God loves us, and does good to us, and tries hard to draw us to himself by his providential kindnesses; but this spirit is far more perfectly exhibited in his gracious covenant. 'God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' The gospel, therefore, the scheme of Divine mercy, is just the high and crowning illustration of the spirit which Christ enjoins here. The Father is good to the unjust as well as to the just, and the grandest proof of that goodness is that He spared not his own Son. The Father is pitiful to the evil as well as the good; and the most glorious manifestation of that compassion is, not his shining sun or falling rain, but the mission and mercy of Jesus. For we were prodigals, and yet he loved us; we were enemies, and yet he loved us; we despised and rejected him, and yet he loved us; we persecuted and slew the Lord of glory, and nevertheless he loved us. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' 'But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' Here, then, is the very gospel—the root of the new life—the fountain of our soul's joy—the motive of our new obedience—the mighty power of God for our

salvation. It all lies in the Father's undeserved love. The entire gospel springs from that rich and gracious source,—not from any merit of ours, not from any spirit of ours, not from any work of ours, but all and only from the fulness of the Father's love. Hence the special force of that concluding word, 'Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.' Consider the wondrous love of God, manifested to us while we were yet without strength and ungodly; and let that be the animating and regulative power of your whole life, casting out of you all malice, hatred, envy, wrath, and bitterness, and filling you with that love which is indeed the only fulfilling of the law. So shall ye approve yourselves as the children of the heavenly Father. So shall the true spirit of His perfect law abide in your heart, and conform you unto Christ. See then that ye love one another as He hath loved you; for there is no law kept where there is no love to keep it, and there is no law broken where love seeketh not her own.

X.

THE LAW KEPT BY SINCERITY.

'Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth; that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.'—MATT. IV. 1-4.

THE passage I have read to-day forms part of the second head or division of this great sermon, the general object of which is to show that God's law can only be fulfilled by a spirit of utter sincerity, earnest and single-minded. Of course, it is not enough that a man be sincere; but, on the other hand, if he is not, there is no value whatever in anything he does. Sincerity is not everything in religion, but it is essential to every religious act. One may be thoroughly in earnest, no doubt, and yet thoroughly wrong; nor will his earnestness turn wrong into right. In science, for example, a man might stoutly believe that the earth stood still in the centre of the universe, while the sun, moon, and stars

were all wheeling round it; but his entire sincerity would make no difference in the astronomical facts. And so it is in religious matters. The thorough honesty of a man's belief will nowise alter its essential truth or untruth. And because religious ideas enter so deeply into our real life, and mould and fashion its character, the moral injury arising from the sincerest erroneous belief may be exceedingly great, for it may poison the very springs of life, and embitter and degrade the whole soul. Sincerity, then, is not everything in religion, yet nothing, as I have said, is of any value without it. We may feel a measure of respect for one who is honestly working out his convictions, however mistaken they be; but we cannot esteem the man who is not earnest and sincere, however sound his views, and however correct his habits. He wants the true heart, and God requireth truth in the inward parts. He is essentially a lie; and the more pious-like his behaviour, so much the more repulsive that lie becomes. To turn worship into a mere form of godliness, denying the power thereof; or, still more, to make religion a mere cloak of hypocrisy in order to gain favour of men; that is of all sins perhaps the worst and blackest: and accordingly there was nothing so roused the meek and lowly Jesus into terrible indignation as the lying religion of Pharisaic insincerity. Nor let us suppose for a moment that such a spirit is one that is not likely to ensnare us. The Pharisee is not dead, though his name be in bad repute; the forms of hypocrisy change, but the heart is still deceitful; and I know of no more

wholesome exercise than to read every now and then, and make personal, testing application of it to our own souls, that stern chapter in which the Lord stands with his fan in his hand thoroughly purging his floor as He denounces woe, and again woe, on hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. Ah ! brethren, we may deceive the world, we may also deceive ourselves, but God is not deceived ; and it is good to stand forth in the searching light of His truth so that our very hearts and reins may be tried. In dealing, then, with this all-important matter of religious sincerity, our Lord selects for illustrations three special duties, viz., almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. They are a class of duties essentially different from those which we had to do with under the former head. To use a common distinction, they are more properly religious than moral. A man might love his neighbour, and keep the seventh commandment, and speak the truth, and do good to his very enemy, and yet he might perhaps neither be, nor get any credit for being, a very religious man. Of course, genuine piety will do all these things, and will breathe into them a holy and loving spirit whereby they shall become an acceptable service of the living God. But some who make no pretensions to religion whatever, may practise such works, and be only known as men of amiable and excellent moral character. It is different with the class of duties noticed under this second head. They are really nothing, if they do not indicate real piety. The man who practises them lays claim at once to a high religious position ; the charity of almsgiving,

the devoutness of prayer, and the spirituality of fasting are the recognised characteristics of the children of God. If real and sincere, they are surely good and beautiful ; but how hateful, on the contrary, if they are only a cloak of hypocrisy. Hence our Lord selects them to illustrate the earnest truthfulness of the Christian character ; for if such things are done as unto man, and not as unto God, then is the law verily not fulfilled, but shamefully outraged and dishonoured. Let us then look at the first of these illustrations.

It was the custom for great personages, princes and governors and such like, when making high procession through some favoured province, to sound a trumpet before them, and scatter largess of gold and silver, whereby they gained the goodwill of the poor. In such distribution of money there was no real charity, and the amount of good done was extremely small indeed. It had more of the show, than the reality of benevolence. It was often accompanied with extortion and oppression ; it arose from no genuine compassion for the sufferings of the poor. It was simply an ostentatious display, intended to win golden opinions from the thoughtless multitude. Our Lord then likens the almsgiving of the Pharisees to this kind of lordly display of munificence. I do not know that they absolutely sent the trumpeter before them through the streets, when they were bent on doing their charities. It is not necessary to understand the words so literally as that. Enough, that their alms were never distributed

without their taking good care, one way or other, to let the good deed be known, so that they might get honour among men. It was not pity that moved them. Theirs was not the tender heart that bleeds for human want or suffering. But they wished to get credit for a high benevolent spirit, and so they trumpeted their alms that they might be seen of men.

Now, let me ask you to note here, in the outset, that the guilt of this conduct lay entirely in the spirit which actuated them. Jesus detected that spirit. He knew what was in men; He knew what was in them; He knew that they gave alms only to gain favour of men. It was not the publicity of their conduct in itself which He blamed, but the ungodly motive which led to that publicity. And I think it is necessary to bear that in mind, lest we may get into the way of judging others, and judging them unjustly, by the mere external appearance. Thus we find, in the present state of society, certain names at the head of every charitable list; and alongside of them the most ample and generous contributions. Those men, too, are highly honoured in the Church and in the world, for they never fail to respond to any just appeal made to their compassions. Externally their conduct may look exactly like that of the Pharisees. They do much alms in a way that is seen of men, and they get a reward in the esteem of their fellow-citizens. But if we were at once to jump to the conclusion that those parties were hypocrites, that they had no object in view except to win favourable opinions of the world, we might be doing very cruel wrong to

them. For, as you know very well, there are many who regulate their givings, not by the clamant nature of the case, nor yet by their own ability to bestow charity, but solely by the example of others, which, in a manner, shames them into doing their duty. Hence the really compassionate and liberal man is often put into the front, and obtains a prominence from which he would otherwise gladly shrink ; and he gets this position, not with the view of exalting him, but in order that his example may stimulate and encourage others. I believe that to many a meek and quiet soul this is a frequent distress. They don't want such publicity ; they would gladly hide their good deeds under an anonymous contribution, and they have infinitely more satisfaction in those silent and unnoticed charities where their left hand knoweth not what their right hand is doing. But the wants of society appear to demand a different line of conduct from what their own humble instincts would dictate ; and the words of our Lord also elsewhere appear to justify the very publicity which He seems here to condemn. For, while it is laid down clearly that the one hand should not know what the other hand is doing, it is also said, in another part of this sermon, that we must not let our light be hid under a bushel. And the difficulty is to reconcile these two things,—to avoid all ostentation, and yet at the same time to get all the advantage of generous Christian example. I am sure that very many feel this difficulty to be a serious one, and are often afraid of falling into a snare by placing their candle in its

proper candlestick, and would be most glad to be left in the calm and quiet privacies of pious benevolence, doing good, and getting no credit for it; and hence it would be altogether wrong to judge that, because some men are foremost in all benevolent liberalities, therefore they must be Pharisees who are seeking praise of men. Brethren, the spirit here is everything; your alms may be distributed publicly or privately as circumstances may require; but whether the one or the other, they must be done as unto God, and not as unto men. Publicity is not necessarily ostentation; though, I believe, the true Christian will shun it as much as he can, because it is very apt to become a snare, and because the credit it brings is prone to gratify the deceitful heart. Yet, on the other hand, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged;' for under all the notability of some men's benevolence you may find a spirit shrinking from honours which it never sought, feeling that its talent has been poorly used at the best, and only dragged into a most unwelcome publicity by the apparent necessities of social life. God knows the heart; Christ knows the heart. But for you and me, who only know outward appearances, the one law should be that of the 'charity which thinketh no evil.'

Bearing that in mind, then, let me now say farther, that the phrase, 'Let not the left hand know what the right hand doeth,' is a proverbial expression, implying that our charity is not to be done ostentatiously so as to be seen of men, nor yet self-righteously so that we may pride ourselves upon it. That almsgiving is, and

always will be, a duty is plainly involved here. 'The poor ye have always with you,' and they always have their claims upon you. It is our duty, indeed, *wisely* to consider the poor, as the Psalmist says, and not a little of the wholesomeness and efficiency of our charities depends on the wisdom which we bring to bear on this matter. Unwise and inconsiderate benevolence may be an indulgence of private feeling not very much to be blamed in itself, and yet it may be extremely pernicious to the parties on whom your charity is bestowed. It may gender a spirit of pauperism ; it may only supply means to gratify sinful appetites ; it may please the giver, and yet hurt the receiver ; and consequently, in these later times, thoughtful men have very generally placed themselves in sheer antagonism to indiscriminate almsgiving, as one of the most unwise and injurious exercises of an otherwise amiable spirit ; and, no doubt, they are quite right on the whole. I do not think indeed that Christian benevolence is never to be exercised in ignorance of all the circumstances, and, as it were, on the mere chance of doing what is good and needful. I would not like to lay down such a rule, or to walk by such a rule, as never left any room for the possible contingencies of the merest incidental charity. It may be abused. No doubt, it often is abused. Yet to have ministered to one case of real want, may well compensate for the possibility of many cases of abused benevolence. I cannot quite dry up the present instinct of compassion, merely because it may be turned to no good account. Still there is cau-

tion to be exercised in this matter, and a thoughtless and indiscriminate almsgiving is far from the wisdom of the gospel.

It is assumed then that the Christian has a duty to perform in this respect ; and what our Lord would have us to understand, is that, in order to be of any worth, our charity must be administered in the simple sincerity of a benevolent heart, not to get praise of men, but because it is the will of God. The fine expressive proverb, ' Let not the left hand know what the right hand doeth,' very probably involves also a lesson of tenderness and delicacy in our almsgiving, so that there shall be no needless publicity, but everything done to spare the feelings of those who receive our bounty. For in this matter, as in many others, it is better to give than to receive. There is a proper spirit of independence, which naturally and rightly shrinks from accepting such gifts, and will rather bear to the verge of endurance than proclaim its necessity. And that feeling is entitled to our thoughtful consideration and respect. It is hard enough to feel the pinching of poverty, without having also a sense of shame aroused. And while it is quite true that there may be a sinful pride which calls itself manly independence, while it is true that one may receive a kindness with as much grace as another may confer it, yet everything should be done to spare the sensitiveness of the poor, for there is a sting in the receiving of alms which is not in the honest earnings of labour. For my own part, when I see those who have striven to win their bread by the sweat of their brow, reduced to beg, or to accept alms, that they and

their children may be fed, I feel almost disposed to ask pardon for offering the aid they need ; and I can well understand the tenderness implied in our Lord's word, 'Let not the left hand know what the right hand doeth.' Let no one offend with needless publicity the sacred sensibilities of the honest poor.

Still that, though fairly enough involved here, is not the special truth which our Lord would fain enforce. His object is to warn us against hypocrisy and self-righteousness. In the first place, He charges the Pharisees with doing their alms in order to be seen of men. There is almost no more certain way in which a man can obtain a high character for piety than to be known for his benevolence. Indeed, prayer and fasting may be recognised as more peculiarly spiritual exercises, having more direct bearing on the inner life, and its fellowship with God ; but they are a kind of cheap religious service, and are consequently more open to suspicion than the splendid compassions which minister to the wants of the poor. When a man's religion so far gets the better of his selfishness as to open his purse-strings freely, and cause him to irrigate the arid wastes of poverty with the surplus streams of his abundant wealth, naturally those who partake of his bounty, and those also who merely look on and witness it, are not disposed, unless they be of a mean and envious spirit, to inquire too curiously into his motives, or to ascribe any, but what are good and honourable to him. Hence the giving of alms is a tolerably sure way of gaining a high religious character. And along with properly

eleemosynary charities, we may fairly reckon all other kinds of religious benevolence, whether for relief of human suffering, or for the maintenance of the Church of Christ. All sorts of giving may be ranked under this general head, and to all of them the same word of the Lord applies. They are now, as of old, the readiest method for getting praise of men. And it may be granted, I think, that even when the liberal giver has no higher object than to stand well with the Church and the world, yet a Pharisee of that type is on the whole preferable to another who has no higher aim, but whose meagre and avaricious nature seeks ever to do its religion in the cheapest possible way. The ostentatious liberality is better after all than the ostentatious prayer. Still it behoves us, not indeed to judge others, not to be eager to set men down as hypocrites, merely because their charities are blazoned abroad, and their praise in every one's mouth,—for that, as I have already shown you, may be nowise of their seeking; but it behoves us also to judge our own hearts faithfully, for if our motive be to gain applause of men, if our almsgiving does not flow from a genuine compassion for the poor; or if our pious contributions for religious objects do not arise from a real and sincere belief in the great and blessed work of the Church; if, consciously or unconsciously, we crave for the publicity and the praise of liberality, then, alas! all the virtue shall have gone from our most excellent gifts; they are a lie and a pretension, and God, who knows the heart, knows them so to be. I do not think,—I should not like to say,—that there are many

who, of set and deliberate purpose, administer their charities only with this view. It might be going too far, and intruding into the province of the All-seeing One, to assert so hard a thing as that. But I do believe this, at any rate, that very few men are in the habit of keeping a jealous watch on their motives so that they may be maintained pure and high; very few men have such a conviction of the heart's deceitfulness as to keep a vigilant eye always on its ensnaring ways; and consequently many are probably actuated by far meaner motives than they are at all aware of. They take things, as we say, in the slump; and there being various reasons for doing what is manifestly right and needful, they do not pause often to inquire which of them is the real moving cause in their own case; for if they did, they would, I am afraid, often find that their almsgivings and other liberalities were done, not rarely, as unto men, and not as unto God. They are regulated by what others do; or they want to look well before the public. But they only half admit this to themselves; and fancy they are entitled to all the credit of a sincere and liberal charity. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. They have it now. They get very much what they want,—even the praise of men. But God regards not such works. Only to this man will He look, whose simple and genuine spirit makes no ostentation of its good deeds, but shrinking from the display and commendation of them, 'doth not let the left hand know what the right hand doeth.'

But further, this proverb also implies that our alms-

givings shall not be done in a self-righteous spirit. It is quite possible not to be seeking praise of men, and yet to take all the merit from our conduct by a complacent sense of the merit that was in it. My friends, one may not sound a trumpet in the streets so as to be seen of men, and yet he may sound the trumpet in his own heart, and thus quite as effectually destroy the spiritual character of his work. Let me here draw a distinction, however, of some moment. There is a certain pleased satisfaction in doing right, the testimony and approbation of a good conscience, which may not be anywise found fault with, for it is the law of God, and accords with his own nature. I suppose that the happiness of the Divine nature lies essentially in the absolute goodness and holiness and truth of all His thoughts and ways, which, being unchangeably excellent, fill Him, doubtless, with unchanging delight. Now, to partake of a grateful joy like that, from having grace to work the works of the Father, is not, by any means, the same thing as the complacency of a self-righteous spirit. For the self-righteous man does not merely feel happy in doing what is good, but he is pleased to think of his own exceeding goodness. There is an element of pride and vanity in him, and self-gratulation, and also a forgetfulness of his many sins and perpetual shortcomings; which altogether mar the simple delight of a true heart in doing what is right. You must distinguish, then, between these two things. I believe that there is a happiness beyond any other, which we find in obeying the will of the Lord. But I also believe that there is a

snare more dangerous than any other, in the self-satisfied complacency of doing occasional good. Now, this last is altogether repugnant to our Lord's teaching here and elsewhere. For the charity which does not let its left hand know what its right hand doeth, is manifestly a spirit of meekness and simplicity, which neither courts the observation of others, nor cares to dwell on its own excellence, but drops its beneficence like dew, in the silence and darkness, so that its presence is known only by the blessing which it leaves behind. But the man who gives an alms, and then settles down in the pride and contentment of his own good desert, hath therein his reward. He has taken all the worth from his work. It has lost its divine character as a deed of true pity, and become an act of merest vanity. God hath no respect to it,—no respect to him : he is not one of those who does not let his left hand know what his right hand doeth.

Finally, let me remind you of another word of Christ's, which appears to me well fitted to crown with a peculiarly blessed significance the somewhat negative teaching of this portion of the word. The Lord here forbids insincerity and display and seeking praise of men in our almsgiving ; and he denounces the hypocrisy of those who sound a trumpet before their good deeds. All well so far ; and it is meet to warn us against such a spirit. He exhorts us also to practise, as it were, an unconscious simplicity in our charities, which will neither think much of them itself, nor regard what others will think of them. But there is a still higher view of the

matter, which gives the positive aspect of duty in this respect a spirituality and evangelical depth of meaning, that must be taken along with this word of Christ's in order to form a perfect idea of the will of God. You will, therefore, remember that our Lord, when he describes to us the great day of judgment, identifies himself with the sorrow and suffering of men, and speaks of all benevolence sincerely shown to them as having been done to him. 'I was an hungered,' He says, 'and ye gave me meat.' Under the garb, then, of afflicted and distressed humanity, Jesus makes an appeal to us. He adopts all such as his own, his children, his peculiar care; and whatever mercy is done to them, he debits to Himself, as if it were done to him. And the obvious meaning of this seems to be, that instead of doing our alms to be seen of men, and instead of doing them in a spirit of self-righteous complacency, He would have us to think of himself as the type of all poor and needy ones, and for His sake, as well as for pity's sake, to show mercy upon them. Let us see, as it were, Christ under all human rags, and in all human afflictions, for He makes the sorrow of man his very special care. And as we love Him, and would render something to him for all his mercies to us, let us deal bountifully with them as we have opportunity, not for praise or reward, but rather as making some fitting acknowledgment of our infinite debt to Jesus. Thus animated in our charities by the love of Christ, our gifts shall be an acceptable offering, a sweet incense of evangelical benevolence; one day to be repaid with a very godlike interest, when

He shall say unto us, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father. I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: thirsty, and ye gave me drink: naked, and ye clothed me: sick and in prison, and ye visited me.' For thus the sincerity of our benevolence is consecrated and exalted by the spirituality of our faith, and the loving service of man becomes truly most acceptable service of God.

XI.

THE LAW KEPT BY SINCERITY.

'And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye,' etc.—MATT. VI. 5-9.

THE privilege of access to a throne of grace, to confess our sins that they may be forgiven, to make known our wants that they may be supplied, to pour all our sorrows and troubles into a Father's ear that he may comfort our souls,—that surely is one of the greatest boons that God could well give, or man could possibly get. I am not going at present to discuss any question as to the efficacy of prayer, and how God, who hath beforehand determined every event, can yet hear the request of his poor and needy ones. I shall have to say somewhat on that head in a future lecture; but alas! for him who, in the day of his sore distress, when all other help is gone, cannot lift up his voice, like a

child 'crying in the dark,' yet assured that its cry shall reach, and touch a father's heart! Meanwhile it is assumed here that the Lord is a prayer-hearing God, and that his people wait upon him that He may incline his ear unto them. It is assumed that wherever there is a contrite heart pouring out its broken, half-articulate sorrows; wherever there is a vexed and troubled spirit calling for Divine help in despair of all other; wherever there is a loving soul longing for the fellowship of God, and that it may see his glory,—there also is an ear open to hear their cry, and a very present help to them in their time of need. Hold fast your confidence in this, brethren, and let 'no one spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.' And though it does require a lively exercise of faith to separate your mind from all the environments of sense, and to feel that you are transacting directly with the unseen God, yet when you can thus realize Him, and speak to Him all the fulness of your heart, you shall find in this fellowship the richest blessing, the surest comfort, the greatest strength, that man can have on earth. Therefore the truly spiritual man delights in prayer, doth all things by prayer, prays always with all supplication and thanksgiving; for prayer is the joy and the might and the peace of the Christian soul.

But in order that it may be so, it must be done in entire sincerity. It must be done as unto God, and not as unto man. It must be spiritual and true, not a mere form and vain repetition. It must neither be a hypo-

critical display in order to be seen of men, nor a heathenish outcry clamorous to be heard for its much speaking. It must be the secret, closet exercise and communion of the soul with the Father that seeth in secret. It must be the believing, confiding prayer of one whose Father knows what he needs, and who trusts that Father to do what is best. These are the four thoughts suggested by this passage, and to these I would now draw your attention :—

1st, ‘When thou prayest,’ the Lord says, ‘thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are ; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.’ The hypocrites to whom Christ here alludes were doubtless the Pharisees ; not indeed all of them, for Nathanael and Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea and Saul of Tarsus were all of that sect, and were obviously true and right-hearted men. But they were exceptions to their class ; and the system which they followed tended to produce, not such as them, but such as Annas and Caiaphas, and the other pious rogues who were so abhorrent to the soul of Jesus. The Sadducees being of a materialistic way of thinking, probably did not pray at all, having lost faith in prayer altogether, and being, at least, honest enough not to pretend to much religion of the spiritual kind. So one might conclude in a general way, though I am by no means sure that they did not do pretty much as the Pharisees did, even while they utterly despised the whole matter. Scepticism is apt to have an easy conscience ; and in

the long-run you shall find it much more ready to agree with the Pharisees than to accept of the heart-searching Christ. At any rate, the hypocrites alluded to here were mainly the Pharisees, the popular religionists, who did not love prayer for its own sake, but for the credit which it gave them ; and whom one might see in any synagogue standing in rapt adoration, or at any street corner, in the throng and concourse of men, lifting up their eyes to the hearer of prayer, and their hearts to the people around.

Now, neither the synagogues nor the streets were the appointed places of prayer. But a custom had risen since the days of Daniel the prophet, to pray seven times a day, at certain appointed hours ; and when those hours came, the Pharisee turned at once to his devotions. He might be in the street, or the market doing business, or he might be in the synagogue hearing the reading of the law ; and of course when people saw him, even in such circumstances, faithful to his pious task, they naturally said, 'How good and holy a man this must be !' Naturally, also, when the Pharisee perceived the high estimation in which he was thus held, he would come by and bye to find himself generally in some public place when the hour of prayer drew nigh ; and so, what may at first have been only a rigid and punctilious observance of a religious custom, gradually, perhaps even insensibly, came to be an ostentatious display—a pretentious exhibition of self-righteousness, without heart or faith or truth, turning the most sacred duties into a very mockery of God. And I wish you to

mark how, as I have just stated, this may have arisen without very much conscious and deliberate and intentional hypocrisy. I am loath to think that there are many people who could calmly say to themselves, 'I will put on a mask of devotion, I will pretend to be more than ordinarily pious, and so I shall gain favour of men, and under cover of that do all the evil that is in mine heart to do.' I cannot think that such base creatures either are now, or ever were very common. And it seems to me that the value and efficacy of our Lord's warnings against hypocrisy are very much lessened, when we suppose them to apply only to characters so vile as that. Let me therefore remind you that most probably the iniquity of the Pharisee grew up in a very natural way, beginning with a scrupulous, but honest observance of religious forms, and gradually sliding into a pretentious and hypocritical display, as he found himself a growing object of respect and esteem among men. Now, when we look at the matter in this light, we shall not find the Pharisee quite so far away from us ; and consequently our Lord's warning will not be so readily set aside, as if it did not concern us. For alas, brethren, the deceitful heart is still as prone as ever to get itself entangled in these snares of the devil. Woful as it is, to think of men standing in the presence of the heart-searching God, and taking into their mouths words of lowly contrition, words of holy faith, words of meek submission, words of devout adoration, and yet all the while only thinking, when they think at all, of the effect they will have on other men, and

the approbation which they will accord, yet am I by no means sure that such hollow prayers are at all uncommon, or that we are, any of us, wholly free from this guilt. We may set aside the picturesque allusion to the hypocrite standing in the synagogue and at the street corners, when the appointed hours of devotion came round. We have no such hours and no such customs ; but the thing itself, the evil which grew up in this way, may be among us for all that, and all the more dangerous that it is not suspected. Bethink you, then ; we too have our pious customary duties, such, for example, as the beautiful exercise of daily family devotion. And how often is that performed in a dull, leaden, spiritless way, just because religious social opinion favours the observance of it, and not because our hearts have any real longing after God. Observe, I do not say that any man can be always in an equally spiritual frame when the hour of daily prayer arrives. And I do not say that he is not to bow the knee duly as the time draws nigh, merely because, on occasions, he finds himself not in so fitting a state as he has sometimes been. But what I do say is, that it is possible, without your perhaps deliberately intending anything of the kind, that by allowing the influence of public opinion to constrain you to engage in such religious exercises, you may in reality go on from day to day, and from year to year, praying from that motive and for that reason only, and never once taking your soul to task, or asking yourself earnestly whether there has been all the while one single gleam of fellowship with God, or one

real yearning of your soul for His salvation. In this way there may grow up a systematic, yet unconscious hypocrisy. For such prayers do not flow out of the fountain of the heart's trouble and care and sorrow. They have nothing to do with the heart at all. They are only constrained by the influence of religious public opinion; and though they may not seem to be offered up at the shrine of Pharisaic ostentation; though they may belong to the quiet privacies of domestic life only; yet not one cry of true prayer may be in them all,—they are simply a sacrifice to the custom of men, done for their sakes only, and not from the felt need, and conscious guilt of the soul, or from any faith in the prayer-hearing God. And is not that, brethren, very much the same thing as the hypocrite's prayer at the street-corner, that he may be seen of men? Again, let me ask you to compare, for a moment, your private devotions with those which you may be called to conduct in the presence of other men. To-day, you are alone with God, and save His ear there is none to hear you; and it is the hour of prayer. But alas! you have little to say; and that little is cold, poor, and meagre. There are no passionate cries, no fervent pleading of promises, no mournful confessions of sin, no rapt views of the riches of Divine grace in Christ Jesus. It is a dull heavy work, soon huddled over, that your thoughts may turn to far other matters. To-morrow, you have to guide, perhaps, the devotions of others, and what a change there is! Your words flow freely, and with all the unction and charm of sacred texts and allusions. Hallowed

thoughts leap up, and crowd for utterance; godly sorrow wails forth its penitence; faith and love seem panting for the Lord, who is their portion, their strength, and their joy. And people say, 'Surely this is a man of God! he has a rare gift of prayer, he must needs live under the shadow of Him that is almighty.' Now, sit down and ask yourself honestly, 'What was the difference between those two prayers? And was there one bit more reality in the one than in the other? I have confessed and deplored sin—did I truly feel its burden? I have pleaded many a promise—had I any trust in its faithfulness? I rejoiced in the grace of God—was I indeed glad for its salvation? I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and made supplication—but how much heart was there in it all? Perhaps I did feel for the moment a certain glow and sensibility and emotion; but how much of it was only the excitement of a speaker, not the genuine tenderness of a soul in the presence of its God! What, if I was praying like the hypocrite, only to be seen of men? Why should my solitary prayer to the Father who seeth in secret be so markedly different from my public devotions in the sanctuary?' Ah! brethren, that is a kind of question which we especially, who minister in holy things, would do well to put often and earnestly to ourselves, though it is fitting also for others as well as for us. I am afraid, too, it will be rather a humbling one to many of us. I am afraid it will discover a good deal of the leaven of the Pharisee lurking where perhaps it was little suspected. But I am very sure it will be a wholesome

thing for us all strenuously to search out even the most secret element of unconscious hypocrisy, and to cast it from us, for otherwise it will be a dead fly in the apothecary's ointment, tainting and corrupting our most sacred services, turning them into a mockery, instead of a trust in God. Therefore, brethren, without adducing other examples of the operation of this deceitful spirit, let me entreat you, with all earnestness, to be on your guard, and watch and pray, and pray and watch against this snare. It is very insidious. It wears often a guise of simplicity and evangelical fervour. It rarely puts on the revolting aspect of deliberate hypocrisy; for that would commonly be to lose its game. But it comes in the shape of a bidden duty, about which all good men are agreed. Or it comes in the shape of a hallowed phraseology which all spiritual minds have accepted as befitting. Only it always, one way or other, puts men and not God in the forefront, and wiles us to do for them what we would not do for Him. Therefore let your prayer and your effort be that the Lord would put truth, utter truth, in your inward parts, that He would set a watch before your lips, and keep the door of your mouth, lest 'ye come before him as his people come, and sit before him as his people sit,' while your hearts all the time are verily seeking the praises of men, and not the favour of God. 'When thou prayest, be not as the hypocrites are.' Therefore,

2d, Our Lord enjoins that his people, when they pray, 'should enter into their closet, and shut-to the door, and pray to the Father which seeth in secret.'

There are a good many lessons which may be fairly enough deduced from this injunction. It is, for example, a legitimate conclusion from such words that every man ought to have a closet, a place of calm privacy, to which he may retire for fellowship with God alone ; and that consequently our social arrangements, which make no provision for this in so many cases, are seriously injurious to the true religious life of the world ; for, alas ! there are many among us who can have no place in their homes to retire to, and pray to the Father who seeth in secret. It is also a fair application of the text, that while the fellowship of united prayer is right and good, yet the special sphere for real communion with God in this exercise is the solitude of a most private intercourse, when one can be alone with the Father, undisturbed by any other influences, to pour forth the whole heart to Him. Still the closet is not absolutely necessary ; the shutting of the door is the one essential point of importance to be considered. For one might have his closet, and might go to pray in his closet, and yet the thought of his heart might be, ‘ Now, men will see how spiritual I am. I turn aside from them. I go apart to meet my God. I do not make any show of religion. They must admit that a man, so much given to closet devotion, is surely a true and faithful servant of the Lord.’ It were quite possible in this way to make the closet as much an ostentation as the synagogue or the street-corner. Therefore the true idea of prayer lies in the shutting of the door. My friends, you may make a closet for yourselves in

the veriest crowd, provided you shut out the world from your thoughts, and lift up your soul to God alone. And that is essentially what the Lord requires of you. It boots not where the real prayer is made. It may be in the synagogue, only it must not be done for the praise of men; it may be at the street-corners, only it must not be to draw attention of them; it may be anywhere, only it must be a real uplifting of the heart unto God, and a shutting out of all consideration for the opinion of the world around—a simple, heartfelt, genuine cry to the Father that seeth in secret. This, and this only, is real prayer. It is to be alone with God, and to transact with Him in the utter truth and sincerity of our souls. O let it be your effort, brethren, thus to shut out of your minds all but the thought of Him with whom you have then to do—all regard for the opinion and the praise of men; for however your prayer may commend itself to them, however evangelical in its form, however full of apparent unction, however glowing with a seeming earnestness, yet if it be not the cry of a true and honest heart, it is idle as the passing wind; and the Lord will not regard it. Shut to the door, then; shut out the world; be alone with God in spirit and in truth. But

3d, There is yet another kind of unreal, and therefore insincere, prayer, against which also the Lord warns us here. We are not to be like the hypocrites who pray to be seen of men, nor yet like the heathen who think they shall be heard for their much speaking. With them prayer was a kind of bodily and mechanical process, supposed to be efficacious just in

proportion to the number of times they could repeat the same cry. So the priests of Baal howled from morning till night their 'O Baal, hear us! Hear us, O Baal!' making the rocks and forests of Carmel echo with their vain repetitions. So, to this day, in the East you may see fanatical devotees yelling a similar prayer, as they whirl their bodies round, until their litany becomes a convulsive and inarticulate gurgling, and they fall to the earth in utter physical exhaustion. The idea in the minds of those men seems to be that prayer is not a spiritual act, but purely a form of words, the virtue of which lies in their clamorous repetition. Now I do not say that one who is in much earnest, or in deep affliction, will not indulge in redundancies of expression. There are times when it is most natural, and indeed when one can do nothing else but just cry, 'God have mercy upon me; Lord have mercy upon me.' There is a state of mind when thought is swallowed up in mere emotion, and one has no words to express the agony of soul, nor any calmness to urge pleas and arguments, so that he can do nothing but pray, and again pray, 'Lord help me; Lord save me, else I perish.' But that is very far from the heathenish kind of vain repetition. There is real soul and heart, and even agonizing emotion, in such a prayer; while the other is but a meaningless mechanical form. Be not ye, then, like the heathen who think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. As to whether even these poor heathens may be heard, or no; whether even their meagre, confused, and distracted cries may, or may not, find something in the

infinite Divine compassions, which is touched by their hapless state ; of that the Lord says nothing here whatever. All He says is, that theirs is not true prayer such as becomes his children, and that we are not to do as they do, for our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him.

And this leads me, in conclusion, to remind you that ye, when ye pray, should come believing in the unseen Father, and trusting in his gracious disposition. Brethren, true prayer is just the cry of children to their Father, and it is the childlike feeling of trust in Him, and love to Him, which gives to their prayer all its efficacy. He does not need to be told what we want ; He knows all that already better than we can tell him. If in the dark night your child in its trouble or pain call for you, not being able to see you, or sure whether you hear, it will call again, and make its weeping complaint until you come. But there is no such uncertainty about your heavenly Father, for the feeblest moan, the faintest inarticulate whisper of your soul, yea its very thoughts, are well known to Him. He is not a God afar off, or asleep, or gone on a journey, so that you need to clamour with vain repetitions like the heathen ; and if He sometimes delays his coming to help you, it is only because He would prove your faith, and see in your patient trusting the true spirit of a child. ‘Wait upon the Lord, then, and be of good courage, for the Lord forsaketh not his saints, none of them that wait on him shall be ashamed.’ Wait upon the Lord, not as the hypocrite, who has an eye all the while to the praise of men, and considers what they

will think of his devout customs and words, so full of the apparent unction and savour of godliness; but try to shut out all other thoughts, and to realize the presence of the heart-searcher and the prayer-hearer. Wait upon the Lord, not with mechanical forms and vain repetitions, as if mere unmeaning clamour were pleasing to him, or as if He did not know your need unless it were thus dinned into his ear. All He wants in your prayer is a spirit of childlike trust in him, and love to him. Therefore, wait on the Lord after that manner which He has so fully and graciously and beautifully set forth in that prayer, which he now gives as the model of all prayer, and which I have already expounded to you so fully, that it needs at present only briefly to mark its general characteristics. Let your cry, then, be to the Father, your Father in heaven, for that is the key-note of all effectual supplication. And if you are truly a child of His, your desire for his glory will surely take precedence of your own personal wants, however urgent,—for a father's honour is more to a child than his own cares or troubles. Therefore, will ye pray that His name may be hallowed on earth, as it is in heaven; that His kingdom may come on earth, as it is in heaven; and that His will may be done on earth, as it is heaven. And because His name, so often dishonoured, shall only be hallowed by the establishment of the reign of Immanuel; and because that kingdom can only come through the renewing work of the Holy Ghost; therefore will ye have respect to the work of that holy and glorious Trinity, wherein lies the blessed fatherhood of God. Nor will you forget the fellowship

of other brethren, and their communion with you, in the wants and sins and temptations of this life ; for when you draw near to the common Father it will not be with a selfish ‘ My Father,’ but, bearing the burden of all the household, you will seek for them, as well as yourself, those things ye all have need of. Therefore, will your prayer be, ‘ Our Father, give us,’ not a competency, to prevent the sense of continual dependence, but daily bread in answer to daily labour and prayer. And ‘ forgive *us* our debts, as we forgive our debtors ;’ for be assured that ‘ if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.’ To the froward, He will show himself froward ; to the bitter and implacable, He will be bitter and implacable. The cry of a hard and heartless man will meet only with a hard and stern God. And finally, conscious of your own weakness, you will seek to be guided in a straight path, in a plain path, not to be sorely tried, at any rate not to be tempted above that you are enabled to bear. In this spirit pray ye the Lord’s prayer. It is not hypocritical ; it is not heathenish ; it is the simple, natural, honest cry of children to a Father ; children who have done wrong, but would fain do right ; children who have wants and weaknesses, but who truly trust in the Lord to supply all their need ; children who bear each other’s burden lovingly on their hearts, and are not merely selfish in their desires ; children whose supreme wish is that all things may be done so as to hallow and glorify their Father in heaven.

XII.

THE LAW KEPT BY SINCERITY.

‘Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.’—MATT. VI. 16-18.

It does not appear that Moses instituted any regular periodic fasts, except one. For the worship of Israel, though enforced by terrible penalties, and exalting Jehovah always as ‘a jealous God,’ ‘a consuming fire,’ was nevertheless in the main a joyful kind of service, with its trumpets cheerily ringing to prayer, its green and fragrant booths made of the myrtle and acacia boughs, its feasts and processions, not without the song and the dance, to the sound of harp and timbrel and all manner instruments of music. But though generally thus of a cheerful type, as became the people whom the Lord had redeemed from bondage, their Divine service had one annual fast, on the great day of atonement, when every man was ‘to afflict his soul’ and ‘to bow down

his head like a bulrush.' It was a day of deliverance indeed, for the scape-goat carried away their sins into the wilderness ; but this deliverance was fitly associated with humiliation and godly sorrow for sin, and therefore the day of atonement was a solemn fast before the Lord. But this was the only fast ordained by the Mosaic law. On the Sabbath, indeed, no fires were to be kindled for cooking meals, but this was simply with the view of procuring a cessation of bodily work, not for the purpose of afflicting the flesh ; and as the Jewish Sabbath began at sunset on Friday, and ended at sunset on Saturday, they could have their evening meal, as usual, prepared without encroaching on the sacred hours, and might well enough put up with their customary breads and fruits and wines in the interval. Certainly the Sabbath was no day of fasting among them, nor do we learn that they had any other prescribed fast, except the yearly day of atonement.

But though they had no appointed periodic fasts, we find them in the course of their history repeatedly abstaining from carnal comforts and delights, both individually, and as a nation. When the ten tribes were smitten before Gibeah of Benjamin, 'they fell down before the ark, and fasted till the evening.' So also, when sore pressed by the Philistines, they assembled before the Lord at Mizpeh, and fasted till the sun went down. Moses fasted forty days on Horeb, and Elijah as many in the same neighbourhood ; and David fasted while his child lay a-dying, and his sin was heavy on

his soul. In New Testament times we find the disciples of John given to this exercise, while those of Jesus were exempted from it; but the reason was that the children of the bride-chamber could not fast so long as the bridegroom was with them; yet 'when the bridegroom was taken away,' it was said their time for it should surely come. And accordingly we read that, whether of necessity or choice, Paul and his brother apostles were 'in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.' We are assured, therefore, that this was a frequent practice both in the Jewish and in the early Christian Church, though it was not expressly enjoined, but was left in a great measure to be regulated by the devout feelings, or spiritual wants of the individual soul. Paul, indeed, resolutely objected to voluntary humility and neglecting of the body, which had a show of wisdom only; but he and all truly spiritual men, in all ages of the Church, have acknowledged the profit and the necessity of occasional fasting, both as the natural expression of an inward sorrow, and also as a wholesome exercise for subduing the law of the flesh which is in our members.

Properly speaking, then, fasting is not so much a duty enjoined by revelation, as it is the natural expression of certain religious feelings and desires. There is but one special fast appointed in the Old Testament, and there is none at all ordained in the New. Yet one cannot fail to see that this exercise is nevertheless quite in accordance with the whole tenor of a true, religious life in all ages; and that, if it is not expressly commanded,

it is only because nature itself teacheth us, in certain circumstances, thus to afflict the soul. These circumstances, which would obviously suggest this exercise, are twofold.

First, fasting is the natural expression of grief; and, therefore, the natural accompaniment of godly sorrow. When the mind is afflicted with any overwhelming anxiety, or pain,—when, for example, sore sickness is in the house, and the heart trembles for any of those whom it fondly loves; or when death has visited the once happy fireside with some bitter bereavement; at such a time the soul loathes its wonted daily bread, and will not be tempted by delicacies; yea, rather revolts at the very thought of them. And up to a certain point this is surely right and good. It is a mistaken kindness that presses dainties on the heart, when it has no appetite for aught but its sorrow. Better let it have its fill of grief,—better every way for body and for mind. Nature bids the mourner fast, and for a season it is well; therefore press not, with officious kindness, needless food on him who is feeding on his sorrow. And exactly in the same way a profound spiritual grief will express itself in a holy fast. I do not know that such grief is very common among us. Our spiritual emotions are somewhat shallow, alas! and apt to evaporate in wordy exclamations, nowise disturbing fleshly appetite. But days have been when it was far otherwise; and men have been to whom a spiritual sorrow, or bereavement, was quite as real and intense and agonizing as any natural affliction. And, ah! if we did but feel aright the ex-

ceeding sinfulness of sin, and the anguish of being bereaved of the light of God's countenance, and the pain of losing the sense of his indwelling grace and help and joy, then would such a sorrow most naturally express itself in fasting as well as prayer, for the bridegroom is gone, and the time is surely come for the children of the bride-chamber to fast and afflict the soul. It would be natural surely to feel under such a grief the indifference and even loathing, which we have all felt for daily bread when some great sorrow was saddening the heart. And it would not only be natural, it would also be good. For when we consider how hard it is to feel, as we ought to feel, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, how blunt and dull our conscience is apt to become, and how the comforting of our bodies forms a sort of cushion on which the soul rests and feels at ease, I think we cannot but conclude that it would be a wholesome exercise to fast from food, as well as from sin, for a season, in order to quicken our higher sensibilities. Spiritual sorrow, then, suggests, and is the better of, this exercise of fasting. But

Second, fasting is also a wise method for keeping down the law of the flesh which is in our members. It is true that no one, no right-thinking Christian, hateth his body, but loveth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church. The ascetic spirit which prompted so many in the early ages of the Church to flee from the habitations of men, thinking that thereby they were forsaking the world, and to live, if life it could be called, in cells and dens, and hermit-

ages and desert places ; squalid, wretched, filthy, denying themselves not the luxuries only, or comforts, but the very necessities of a cleanly and healthy existence ; that was altogether a false view of Christian fasting, not only unprofitable, but verily pernicious. Many, indeed, of those, especially of the earlier class, who indulged in such practices, were animated by the highest motives, and were truly seeking after God ;—far different men from the hypocrites who, in later years, pretended to follow their example. But still they were mistaken men, who looked on the body as properly the seat and origin of sin,—yea, as in itself a wicked thing, tainted with moral poison which could only be purged out of it by extreme mortification of the flesh. And, alas ! they could not escape from sin by any kind of bodily exercise. Laceration and maceration of the flesh still left the carnal man, with some change, perhaps, in the direction of his passions, yet almost as decidedly as ever inclined to all ungodliness. Still, brethren, while that is true, and while we cannot depart from evil by merely mortifying our members, yet there is something to be done also in that way, so that we may not be led into temptation. Fasting is a wholesome accompaniment of prayer ; for a pampered body is apt to make an easy and careless soul. Indulgence strengthens its appetites. Abundance weakens the sense of dependence. Fulness of bread works often leanness of soul. There is so close a connexion between body and mind that the state of the one inevitably reacts on the state of the other ; and therefore occasional fasting is good to keep down the impulse

of the flesh from warring against the aspiration of the spirit. The poor, who have a perpetual Lent, may not require this so much as those whose table is full ; and therefore it was wise not to lay down rigid and universal rules for it. But rich and poor will be the better of a fast now and then, to mortify the flesh, to weaken the incentives to evil, to subdue in some measure the carnal nature, and give freer play and power to the spiritual man within. For when we pray, 'Lead us not into temptation,' it will be well to remember that our temptations often come from a soft and luxurious habit, from a pampered and much-indulged body, which therefore it is fit to mortify, so as to weaken the springs and suggestions of evil. So Paul says, 'I keep my body under subjection ;' and so the Lord, when he was led by the Spirit to be tempted, kept his long fast of forty days in the wilderness.

Such, then, are the circumstances which will naturally call the man of God to this exercise. A profound spiritual sorrow will suggest, or rather constrain a fast, and a practical effort to keep the body under subjection will lead not only to temperance in all things, but also to occasional abstinence altogether from food. But such being the case,—this duty being thus left, without any special legislation on the subject, to the inward impulse and spiritual want of the soul,—any pretence to fast, where there was no real sorrow, and no desire to subdue the flesh, was a most gratuitous mockery of holy things. Ostentatious almsgiving might be worthless enough in the sight of God, yet some of the poor might profit by

its charities. Ostentatious prayer was hollow and profitless, but at least there was a command that all men should pray; and to appearance that command was obeyed. But pretentious fasting could advantage no one, and had no excuse of a Divine injunction; it was simply, and in a most revolting way, a mockery of God in order to win the good opinion of men. This was what the hypocrites did, knowing that popular feeling was ready to ascribe peculiar sanctity to those who gave up fleshly delights and indulgences. They had frequent fasts, at least to all outward appearance,—coming before the world with a sad visage, clothed in sackcloth, and scattering ashes on their head, as the custom was in Israel when one was stricken with an overwhelming grief. But at heart they had no godly sorrow, no mourning for sin, no longing after God, no desire to keep down the flesh; and in reality they indemnified themselves, for their public discomforts, by a more abundant private indulgence. Their fasting was all a hypocritical pretence, to be seen of men, to get the reputation of superlative goodness, to be honoured as the chosen and peculiar people. Of course this result they very generally secured, for man judgeth by the outward appearance; and that was their reward. He that seeth the heart, however, knew their utter insincerity; and as we turn with loathing from any one who affects an exceeding sorrow, when we know that in his very soul he is exulting in the profit which is to accrue to him, so did Jesus revolt from those hypocrites who rent their garments while their hearts

were quite whole; for it hardens the heart, and it sears the conscience, and it deadens all our better nature, thus to traffic in sacred things for very worldly gain.

In clear and marked opposition to this Pharisaic spirit, then, our Lord counsels his people—

1. That their fasting must be real, sincere, genuine, a thing to be seen, not of men, but of God. Let me entreat you, brethren, once more, ere leaving this part of the sermon, to lay this matter of sincerity faithfully to heart. Ah! we do many things for appearances, and frankly avow it, and even counsel others to do so. Nor do I deny that in things indifferent, concerning which I may claim liberty to myself, it may yet be expedient to have respect to the opinions and even prejudices of the world, and not needlessly to invoke its dislike. But while there is undeniably a limited sphere in which it is well to have a prudent consideration for appearances, yet let us beware how we give place to that feeling, for it is apt to become a snare, and to encroach on those regions of duty where God should be all in all. Nothing more effectually saps and undermines the spirituality of religion, and the heroism of faith, than to be always shaping and modifying our conduct by the opinion of men, and to gain their favourable verdict. There may be no conscious hypocrisy in such conduct. It may arise only from a habitual and not unnatural anxiety to gain their good-will in all things. But it is apt to extend its influence ever more and more, until it become the leading motive of our lives, eating out the truth and

sincerity of our hearts, and turning all our conduct into a hollow regard for appearances. The man who would retain the integrity of his heart, brethren, will, as far as possible, put out of view all considerations of that kind, and do all things as in the sight of God, resolved to be found sincere and true in His eyes. For if there is a thing to be dreaded as utterly destructive of all true religion, and all moral worth, and all acceptance with God, it is the spirit of insincerity. Whatever is not real and heartfelt is most abhorrent to the Lord, and as the heart is naturally prone to deceit, we ought to be specially on our guard against every plea, and every custom which tends in any measure to weaken the high-toned earnestness and truth of our lives. Let us take heed, then, how we act for the sake of appearances, or how we urge others to act from that motive, for human nature is always ready enough to fall into that line of conduct, and to yield itself to the influence of such arguments, until gradually they gain the complete sway over our actions, and nothing is done honestly for God, but all to win favour of men. And even although a stern sincerity of soul may sometimes look harsh and unconciliating, yet is there infinitely more safety in it, and more nobleness and power in it, than in the feeble compliance in which we are so apt to indulge for the sake of men, and which, alas! so often leads to utter hypocrisy of heart. See then that ye are true in all things; and, for that end, do all things not as in the sight of man, but as in the sight of God. And surely when ye fast, ye will not be as the hypocrites, but

will exercise yourselves as becomes those who are mourning after a godly sort, or who are striving to keep the body under subjection, and to mortify the law of sin which is in your members.

2. But further, I apprehend that our Lord means here to say that fasting in the Christian Church should be altogether private, and even secret, not only not in order to be seen of men, but absolutely hidden from them. That this may appear clearly, you will note that no periodic fasts are appointed in the new covenant, not even an equivalent for the Jewish day of atonement. The whole matter is left to the personal regulation of individual Christians. We do not even read that the apostles, or the presbyters ever ordained a fast to be kept in the primitive Church. And the duty being thus left to be ordered exclusively by the wants and feelings of each believer, all that our Lord enjoins on the subject, is that, when his people do fast, they are not to wear a sad countenance, but to wash and anoint themselves as usual, and wear the cheerful appearance of their common life. Thus there is a positive forbidding of display in this matter; and even a positive injunction of the reverse. In prayer, the Christian was told to go into his closet, and to shut the door of it; but in fasting, he is to go somewhat beyond that unostentatious line of conduct,—for it is rather to be carefully concealed from men, by the washing and anointing of a cheerful countenance. And the reason of this difference is, I think, that Jesus wants his people to present religion in the light of a happy and joyful life, and not

to revolt men from it by a harsh and ascetic severity. It is true, indeed, that men who wore a sad countenance, and denied themselves bodily comforts, living much in squalor and wretchedness, got credit for a peculiar amount of piety. But they did not commend a religious life in that way. People praised them, but would not join them. They were esteemed superlatively religious, but few chose to copy them. Their credit, in short, brought discredit on God's service. Men shrunk from it, while they admired it. Now it is the very reverse of this which Jesus wants to cherish. He would have his people seek no credit for themselves. He would have them also to commend the gospel to others. Hence, while their own spiritual life may, and ought to lead them at times to fasting and bitterness of soul, He bids them practically conceal such exercises, as being indeed profitable for them, but rather injurious to the great cause, by presenting it in a light from which many would naturally shrink. Religion does not consist in a sour visage and a morose habit. Nay more, religion is not properly a sorrowful thing. The gospel is not sad tidings, but glad tidings to all mankind. And we are not acting fairly by it, unless we strive so to present it, in all its winning and attractive beauty, that men shall be led to seek after Jesus. And if any one say that this is, in reality, to counsel a kind of *quasi*-hypocrisy, to bid men affect a happiness which at heart they do not feel, I might reply that there are many circumstances where such conduct is not only justifiable, but highly to be commended. Thus, for example, in

the midst of danger, he that has charge and responsibility in the matter, though quite conscious of the peril, will wear as cheerful an aspect as possible; for if he give way to despondency, he may cause a panic among the ignorant, which will very greatly increase the evil. His duty clearly is to be as calm and hopeful and cheerful as he may. It is one thing to pretend a sorrow which you do not feel, in order to win the good opinion of men, and a very different thing to put on a cheerfulness which you hardly feel, in order to save men from greater evil. The one is a selfish hypocrisy; the other is a mask of love. But though I might thus fairly enough deal with such an objection, I am not shut up to that course. For I assert that, with all its sorrows and with all its trials, and with all its needful fastings, the life of faith is really and absolutely a life of joy unspeakable and full of glory. It is no pretence to wear the cheerful face of him who hath washed and anointed himself; it is no mere amiable hypocrisy to present vital godliness in the light of true happiness; it is verily true, and verily our duty so to show it, for in the deepest and most real sense of it, it is a happier thing even to suffer affliction with the children of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Christianity has its godly sorrow, has its heart-grief for sin, has its fasting and mortifying of the flesh; yet we do it utter injustice, unless we also make it appear that it is, taken as a whole, the only true blessedness and peace and joy, the only walk with God which is gladness everlasting. Therefore, 'when thou fastest, be not as the

hypocrites are, who put on a sad countenance.' Who hath such reason to be joyful as you? Your sins are forgiven; your souls are justified; your offering is accepted; your life is guided and shielded by the Lord. 'Wash ye and anoint ye, then, with the oil of gladness.'

'*When ye fast,*' the Lord says, not enjoining it, but assuming that ye do it, because ye feel the need of it in your spiritual life. But is that really the case? Is it not, on the contrary, fallen quite obsolete among us? We have the name; nay, we have appointed fasts, when nobody does fast; and I do not care much for the neglect of such, seeing that our Lord and his apostles ordained no such special occasions. But does our inner life from its felt necessities ever prompt us to this exercise? Do our spiritual anxieties ever fill us with such godly sorrow that, as at a time of natural grief, we make no account of wonted luxuries and comforts of the flesh? Does the sense of sin, still abiding in our members, ever call us to use this weapon of our warfare, and strive to mortify our members, and to keep the body under subjection? Do we ever really fast, not to be seen of men, not in hypocritical pretence, not in self-righteous affliction of the flesh, but because it is really a portion of the needful and wholesome discipline by which the strength of temptation is in some measure restrained, and the conflict lightened between the flesh and the spirit? In this view, brethren, I beseech you to look at the matter, and to consider whether we have not all of us failed in this duty, and put our souls

in consequence to a disadvantage, whereby the better life is weak and faint and ready to die. When ye fast, then, be not as the hypocrites are, but do the work, in truth, as unto God and not as unto men, because ye are truly sorrowing for sin, and because ye are faithfully striving to keep the body under subjection.

XIII.

THE LAW KEPT BY FAITH.

'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal : but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal : for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.'—MATT. VI. 19-21.

THE third division of this Sermon on the Mount, beginning at ver. 19 and going on to the end of this chapter, has for its object to show that the law of God must be fulfilled by avoiding a worldly spirit, with its cares and fears, and by seeking with our whole heart the kingdom of God and his righteousness. It is the heavenly mind with its trust, as opposed to the worldly mind with its anxiety, that He strives here to inculcate. Obviously, therefore, the idea of Faith lies at the root of this part of the discourse—faith in things spiritual, faith in God's fatherly care, that 'faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.' And this He enforces under three different views :—First, He exhorts his followers to lay up treasures not in earth, but in heaven ; that is to say,

he would fain have them to believe in, and to set their hearts on, those unseen realities which are so apt to be pushed aside by the things of sense, the perishable riches of this passing world : secondly, He warns them against being ensnared by the temptation of trying to secure both the riches of this world, and those treasures which never fade ; that is to say, He would fain have them give their hearts' undivided faith and allegiance to God, for if they seek to serve both God and mammon, they will lose that singleness of eye which is the light of life : thirdly, He entreats them to put away their cares and anxieties, seeing that He who cares for the birds and the lilies would surely provide for them those things which are needful ; that is to say, He would fain have them trust in their heavenly Father who, more than any earthly father, loveth and cherisheth his children. And here I cannot help thinking that the passage beginning with the 7th, and ending with the 11th verse of next chapter, has in some way been displaced, for it seems very clearly to belong to this part of the sermon. Nothing could be more natural than to follow up the exhortation, 'Take no thought for to-morrow,' with the further concluding advice, 'Ask, and it shall be given to you;' and to enforce the great lesson of faith by the exquisite parable, 'What man is there among you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?' Thus the third division of the sermon calls us to obey the law by faith in things unseen, and faith towards God as our Father in heaven.

Let us now look at the first part of this exhortation; 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.' In order to understand precisely the terms used here, it will be well to remember what formed in those Eastern countries the cherished treasures of the people, and how in troubled times they sought eagerly to preserve them. When we speak of treasures, we commonly refer simply to money which is the symbol of all value among us; and though, of course, it is liable to be stolen, the idea of corrupting moth or rust has no bearing on such possessions. But the treasures of the East consisted, not of gold and silver and jewels only, but of precious garments and garnered corn. Unlike our modern customs, which delight in change, so that raiment, when it is worn but a few times, is cast aside as useless, it is the way in the East to hoard rich and costly apparel, used only on great occasions, and handed down from father to son, not as heirlooms merely, but truly as part of the family estate. Gold and raiment and corn, therefore, all entered into their idea of treasures; and in such troubled countries, so frequently overrun by incursions of predatory hordes who made war not so much for conquest as for booty, it was a frequent anxiety with the householder to know how best to conceal his possessions. Burying them in the earth, was therefore a common resource, but, however hidden, they were liable to perish and decay. The thief threatened the gold and silver; the moth threatened the splendid robe; and the rust threatened the corn; and if they were safest when buried, they were also of least service;

for one might almost be as well without them altogether. Hence, the terms of our Lord's exhortation, 'Lay not up treasures on earth, where moth and rust do corrupt, and thieves break through to steal.'

Our Lord then warns his people against hoarding up the treasures of this world, and under that term he embraces obviously all earthly possessions whatsoever, whether gold or jewels, or lands or garments, or books or pictures, or food, or aught that is esteemed of value among us. There can be no doubt that his words apply to all kinds of property ; and, taken by themselves, they seem to forbid the accumulation of any sort of possessions, lest our hearts should be entangled in their snares. Hence some have represented the Lord Jesus as one of those simple and high-minded, but ignorant enthusiasts, who, in striving to raise men above the gross and sensual pleasures of life, and to make them better and worthier of their high calling, fall into the opposite and common mistake of regarding wealth, and all that wealth can secure of graceful and intellectual enjoyment, as in themselves wrong and wicked and to be carefully avoided. He would reduce, say they, all men to the same level of poverty, so that they might set their affections exclusively on things above. And then they argue that, even if this could secure a greater heavenly-mindedness, which is by no means certain, for the poor are in their own way just as worldly as the rich, yet it would be a gospel at war with the laws of progress, and destructive of the noblest arts and triumphs of civilisation. For, if there ought

to be no accumulation of wealth, it is obvious that neither can there be any of those great undertakings which depend almost entirely on a ready command of capital. Our roads and railways, opening up the resources of the world for man's behoof; our farms and merchandise, supplying the wants of myriads of human beings; to say nothing of stately edifice and beautiful picture, so refining and elevating, however perishable,—all of them were impossible, unless there were immense accumulations of wealth. Moreover, it is one of the economic laws of nature, which too are laws of God, that industry will be fruitful, and must gather treasures. Men neither can, nor ought to spend, as fast as they make money; and without trying to hoard it, they cannot help increasing it even more by circulation than they could by saving. And thus they argue themselves into a belief that our Lord's word here is a well-meant, but unwise saying, opposed to natural economic laws, injurious to the progress and well-being of society, and, even if it were practicable, far from certain to secure the object He had in view; for though all the world were as poor as the poorest now are, they would, in all likelihood, be just as little heavenly-minded as if coffer and barn were full to overflow.

Now all these objections would be fair and reasonable, if they did not proceed on an entire misunderstanding of our Lord's meaning. And here let me remind you that Jesus, in order to secure the attention of his hearers, was accustomed often to express his mind in brief and picturesque aphorisms, and even in

startling paradoxes, which were not to be taken literally, but in their spirit, and as explained by the general drift of his teaching. He was not afraid to speak such things, because he felt that no honest and true mind would really misunderstand his meaning; and as for those who were false and dishonest, alas! they misinterpreted him at every turn, and would have done so, let him be as guarded as he might. Bearing that in mind, let me say that our Lord, while He proclaimed glad tidings to the poor, and, on the whole, regarded their snares and difficulties as less dangerous than those that beset the rich,—for which reason He said ‘that it was as hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle,’—yet, in reality, never denounced wealth, or warred against property, or required the mass of his followers to enter into voluntary poverty. His apostles, indeed, and the seventy disciples, were required to have neither purse nor scrip; and there was reason in that, seeing that they had a life before them which inevitably involved severe trials and hardships, which therefore it was best to face at once, and to lessen the sense of hardship by a voluntary renunciation of earthly possessions. But Jesus never demanded of his few rich followers that they should follow this example. Zaccheus was left to do with his ill-got wealth as conscience prompted. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews, and probably therefore a man of substance; but though he needed to be born again, there is no word of his being required to take vows of poverty. Of the various women who ministered to him, Susannah was wife of Herod’s

steward, and therefore a person of some rank in the state ; nor was she ever forced to give up her place or possessions. Altogether, it is clear that the sort of levelling theories which are sometimes ascribed to Jesus, had no foundation in fact, and therefore arguments against them fall to the ground. They never were objected to Him in his own day, however ready his enemies were to avail themselves of everything to his disadvantage. And indeed they are utterly opposed to the whole idea of his teaching, which was to cure the evils of the world by changing men's *hearts*, not by mere outward arrangements. His social reforms were all to begin in spiritual regeneration, therefore it was not property he warred against, but the love of it ; it was not capital he opposed, but worldliness. When He said, 'Lay not up treasures on earth,' he did not mean that there was anything wrong in possessing such things ; the wrong was in setting our hearts on obtaining them. It was not wicked in a family to have goodly apparel transmitted from sire to son ; but to make the getting, or keeping of such things our great concern, was to neglect the better part. There was nothing sinful in having a garner full of corn, to supply daily need ; but it was wrong to give themselves to that, as if that were the one great object of existence. As little was there any evil in the natural accumulation of gold ; but He would not have men to regard that as the main end of life ; and when, nevertheless, it did accrue to them, He would have said, with the Psalmist, 'If riches increase, set not your hearts upon them.'

Thus it appears that this word of Christ's, and others

of a similar character, which He spake on other occasions, did not mean literally to forbid the natural accumulation of capital and property, which certainly would have placed the gospel in opposition to some of the laws of social progress. And that it did not so mean, is further proved by the fact that, in reality, the civilisation of the modern world keeps pace with the advance of the Christian faith; and those countries in which the gospel is upheld in greatest purity, and manifests its greatest living power, are precisely those which are most signally known for their successful prosecution of all honest industry. I am far indeed from saying that in those lands this command of our Lord's is not frequently neglected. Of course it is, as we all know to our shame. There are many among us whose one concern it is to lay up corruptible treasures; but there are also many who are as earnest to secure the heavenly inheritance, and who do obey the law of the Lord, and yet do also increase in wealth. And this shows that true Christianity is not a system of artificial poverty, but a spiritual unworldliness. O that we only, one and all of us, learnt the great lesson, and understood what is the true riches, and set ourselves to secure them. For it is the right direction of the heart that Christ wants to determine, seeing that 'where our treasure is there will our heart be also.' He does not aim at reducing all to a dead-level of poverty; He does not assert that, if such an object could be secured, men would be so much the more heavenly-minded. What He wants is that we should begin at once to seek

those things which are above, instead of making it our great concern to gather gold and silver and apparel. He would have faith in the things that are unseen, for if we start aright in life, believing in these, and seeking them, then shall our hearts be where our treasure is. But alas! instead of that, how common is it to find men, professedly Christian men too, who are only and altogether engrossed with the eager activities of secular aggrandizement, planning, scheming, getting, gaining, with hardly ever a thought for aught above the perishable treasures of a perishable world. Perhaps they justify this to themselves by saying that, in the crush of passionate and even reckless competition, they would inevitably be driven to the wall, unless they bent their whole energies, and gave their whole minds to the task. But that, after all, is only a plausible excuse, for when any other object seems to be desirable, when, for example, ambition comes to allure them, they easily find time and thought and strength, amid all their avocations, to secure its coveted prizes. Or perhaps they allow that it is wrong to neglect their higher eternal interests, but plead in their own minds, at least, for a little while, just to secure a little competency, and freedom from worrying anxieties, after which they propose to give themselves rest, and to deal with these weightier concerns as they deserve to be dealt with. But having given the foremost place to the treasures of this earth, the more these accumulate the stronger hold they get. Having been careful to gather a little, they become doubly careful now to keep it, or to

increase it. Where their treasures are, there is their heart also. Wealth, with the pleasures it can purchase, and the honours and influence it secures for them, and the refinements and comforts with which it surrounds them, these get firm possession of their minds by countless threads of feeling, and rivets of habit, not to be torn asunder without some terrible wrench ; and any better purposes they may have once cherished, or any sad regrets they may have once known, are by and by silenced and forgotten as the soul takes its ease in the multitude of its possessions. Brethren, all this may appear to you somewhat commonplace moralizing on a worldly spirit. But is it not true, deplorably true ? Is it not a thing familiar to you all, that when men begin life, as many do begin it, having for their great object to gather the treasures of this world, their hearts are thus seized hold of, and absorbed by the passionate craving for much, and for still more, till everything else is practically swept out of view, and God and Christ and eternity are lost in the golden mist that envelops and blinds the soul ? And this is unquestionably the special besetting snare of a great commercial city like this, where fortunes are so often rapidly accumulated, and where too there is almost nothing else to compete in interest with the successful prosecution of gain ; so that here, if anywhere, however familiar and commonplace, it is needful to reiterate the earnest word of the Lord, ‘ Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust do corrupt, for where your treasure is there shall your heart be also.’

Now, the special reason given here for inculcating this lesson, is that 'moth and rust corrupt them, and thieves break through to steal.' These treasures are precarious at the best, and perishable certainly in the long-run. Brethren, this is not the only reason why we ought not to set our affections on such possessions. Perhaps, in a sense, it is not the highest reason; but it is one which it was surely fitting for Christ to use along with others. It would be a mistake, it would be altogether unfair to the gospel, to represent it as urging men to forsake worldliness, only because of the transitory nature of the world's best treasures. In another place, our Lord reminds us that they are sadly unsatisfactory—broken cisterns that cannot quench the thirst and longing of the soul. In the verses immediately succeeding, He tells us that the pursuit of such things makes the eye evil, and the whole body full of darkness; implying doubtless, among other things, that when our hearts are set only or chiefly on the possessions of this world, that will exercise a degrading and deteriorating and, as it were, blinding influence upon us, so that we shall no more walk as children of the light, but verily as children of the darkness. And that would embrace the common argument of philosophers against worldliness, viz., that it is not worthy a being so richly gifted, and that it miserably impairs the spiritual nobility of man. Now, these and other arguments are all valid, and should all be laid to heart, and are all scriptural and true. You shall not find real satisfaction in those treasures, but rather in the long-run they will mock you

with a too late conviction of their hollowness and vanity. And it is altogether unworthy of a creature, fitted to hold high converse with God and truth and all that is most elevating and divine, to degrade himself to mean pursuits whose highest fruits are a little meat and drink, and mouth-honour and vain display. But allowing the force of these and all similar considerations, I would also press on you this further consideration, that 'the moth and rust doth corrupt, and the thief breaks through to steal' such treasures. Brethren, had the Lord omitted to warn us of the transitory nature of those things, He would not have shown either the kindness, or the wisdom which He did uniformly display. Were we left to go on accumulating riches, and getting our hearts more and more bound up in them, so that our whole hopes and existence really depended on their security, and were we some day to find all the splendid structure of our plans and purposes and enjoyments fallen crash to the earth, overthrown, say, by one of the many vicissitudes of commercial life, or by the base roguery of some dishonest and trusted friend, might we not reasonably complain that we ought to have been warned that such an event was possible, and that it was unkind and unfair to let us go on, gathering and garnering and giving our whole heart to these treasures, without one hint being given to us that we might lose in a moment all the fruits of our labour, and be stript of all on which our happiness did rest? Such a complaint, in such circumstances, would have been natural and right. But the Lord is too kind and

good thus to leave us unprepared. He does not indeed ask us to lay up treasures in heaven, because, on a selfish calculation of profit and loss, that will be found the wisest course, seeing that other treasures are at once precarious and perishing. That is a wrong way of putting the matter, frequently adopted by those who would fain depreciate the value of every gospel lesson. But knowing that earthly treasures do fade and pass away, He most kindly and mercifully warns us not to lay up for ourselves sure disappointment and regret; and as I have said, He would not have been the kind and faithful master that he is, if he had not thus put us on our guard. I beseech you therefore, brethren, to lay his good word to heart, and set not your affections on the things which are seen, for the 'things which are seen are temporal.' Riches take wings any moment. Honours are but breath, and like breath they dissolve. A sudden collapse in the market may sweep your all away; and what, if your heart and only hope are swept away with it? And even if human affairs were not so precarious as they certainly are, still the things seen are temporal. One day or other, we must part with them all; one day or other, death, like a nipping winter, shall wither all the glorious beauty of earth, which is but as a fading flower. And what, then, if we have nought else to look to, nought else to lean on, nought else to joy in, nought else to hope for; and the soul, torn from its envied riches, stands beggared for ever before the wealth and the glory of God? Surely it will be well, now while it is yet time, to give heed to the good word of the Lord, 'Lay

not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through to steal.'

Now, by the laying up of treasures in heaven I understand the pursuit not of things carnal, but spiritual. It is to set our hearts on obtaining the knowledge and wisdom, the virtues and graces of God's true sons. It is to seek moral worth and truth and love above all possessions and honours of this world. It is to labour to do good rather than to get profit of any kind; for such good works are kept in God's treasury carefully. Or to sum up all in one word, it is 'to win Christ and be found in him' and He in us; for the indwelling of Christ is verily a possession for ever, an inheritance that cannot be taken away. These are imperishable treasures which you may lay up there where moth and rust do not corrupt. There is One who was rich, and for your sakes became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich; One who loved you and veiled his glory for you in robes of humiliation and shame; One who suffered for you and died for you, and now is in heaven for you, the heir and administrator of all, and in the possession of whom all the wealth and fulness of God shall be yours. Get what else you may, your heart will still be aching; drink what else you may, your soul will still be thirsting; attain what else you may, all of it will soon perish; for it is all as short-lived as it is unsatisfying. There is a time coming when all the gold in the world will not purchase a breath to the nostrils, or a beat of the pulse, or smooth the hard pillow of

death, which you would gladly give your all to secure. But in that day, and the day after, when all this world is nothing to you, if you have sought Him, the Lord your righteousness, the Lord your life, the Lord the true riches, then when all is lost, truly all is gained by you, for the riches imperishable await you in the Lord. The one grand concern for you, then, should be to get God's unspeakable gift, to be in Christ, to obtain the spirit of Christ, to abound in the grace of Christ, to be wholly conformed to Christ. These are the treasures that never fade. They are not something apart from you, which can be taken away; they belong to character; they pertain to your very innermost being, they are Christ in you the hope of glory. These are the real treasures, and they are eternal; treasures of knowledge and wisdom, all hid in Christ; riches of grace and peace, all found in Christ. Oh to know Him, oh to win Him, oh to be filled with all fulness of God! Understand, then, that these are the true wealth and glory of man; and then 'where your treasure is there shall your heart be also.'

I beseech you, brethren, to give earnest heed to this word of the Lord. I say *earnest heed*, for it will not do just to hear it, and to allow that it is a good and faithful saying, and then go your way. There is an immense power exercised by the things of sense, a manifold and widely-ramified influence of worldliness, which is not to be overcome without most strenuous and persevering effort. The things seen appear to the natural man so real, their advantages so palpable, and

their insecurity and uncertainty are so easily cast into shade, that almost instinctively, and from the very first dawnings of intelligence, he begins to look to them as the chief object of desire, the main end to be achieved. So the mass and multitude are found rushing and crowding and jostling each other on every avenue of worldly promotion, thinking the great concern is to *get on*, to increase wealth, and rise in the scale of social estimation, no matter although all the higher nature is deteriorating in the unworthy struggle; no matter although they find themselves not a bit happier or more contented with their growing aggrandizement; no matter although they know that by and by it will all pass from them, and all the fruits of their labour perish to them for ever. So forward and forcible then are these worldly desires, that nothing but the most earnest effort will really master them; nothing but a vivid consciousness of the infinite worth of the heavenly treasures will enable us to contend against them. But 'this is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith.' Let a man truly believe; let him look to Christ, and see in the glory of his poverty where the true riches lie; let him learn of Christ the transcendent worth of things unseen and eternal; let him walk and work along with Christ, and by meekness and patience and truth, and mercy to the erring, and love to all men and to God above all, so let him lay up the treasures where moth and rust do not corrupt, and no thief can break through to steal; so let him live by faith, and verily he should overcome the world.

XIV.

THE LAW KEPT BY FAITH.

'The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.'—MATT. VI. 22-24.

YOU will remember that the fundamental idea of this part of our Lord's sermon is, that God's law can only be fulfilled by faith,—faith in things unseen; faith, or patient reliance on God's fatherly care. This He enforces, first, by exhorting us not to lay up treasures on earth, but to have faith in the true riches, the things spiritual which alone are eternal. He now goes on to illustrate the same great essential truth, by warning us against that divided allegiance which some try to give, partly to God and partly to mammon, believing a little in things spiritual, and a good deal in things temporal, and striving if possible to secure them both. This, He gives us to understand, is what no man can do; this is not to live by faith; these two masters are incom-

patible; this double service no man can achieve. If we would really live by faith, we must seek God only, God wholly, God with all our heart. That is the drift, then, of this part of the sermon.

But this truth is introduced by a striking and profoundly expressive illustration in which, however, it is at first somewhat difficult to trace the precise connexion of idea: 'The light of the body is the eye; but if the eye be evil, the whole body is full of darkness.' Now, what renders this figure rather difficult, is that it appears to have a twofold reference, partly to what precedes, and partly to what follows. The eye may be rendered evil either by looking to the things which are seen only, or by the effort to serve both God and mammon. The illustration is equally applicable to the worldly-minded whose treasures are all on earth, or to the double-minded who would fain secure both the spiritual and the temporal riches. It will need therefore a little explanation so that we may clearly grasp the whole idea.

The light of the body, Christ says, is the eye; not of itself indeed, for if it were surrounded by darkness, it would roll its sightless orbs to no purpose. But it is the organ of light,—a window curiously and cunningly fashioned, through which impressions are conveyed to the mind, and out of which the soul looks abroad upon the world. Without it, all the pictured scenery of earth would be to us as if it had no existence; and the sun would shine in vain around our steps, and the fields would spread their beauties around us all in vain. In

that sense, the light of the body is the eye; but not in that sense only. Not merely does the external light find its way to the mind through the eye; but the mind also, which has a light of its own, sends forth through the eye the light that is in it. I wish you to note this last point, because it is chiefly on this fact that the illustration rests. The light without us passes through the eye; but the light within us also beams through the same organ. Love kindles there its tender watch-lamp, and wrath also flashes its angry glances there. The pure heart beams forth in its honest look, the base lust also shows there its lewd fire. The clear understanding meets you with a steadfast gaze there, and folly also blinks and glimmers in the eye. In this twofold sense, the light of the body is the eye; if it be healthy and sound, the forms and colours of the external world become, by its means, visible to the mind, and, in like manner, it exhibits the emotions and passions and desires of the innermost soul.

Now, this inward light mightily influences our vision of that on which we look, and makes the eye good or evil, in proportion as it is true or false. Observe, what we have to do with just now, is not the illustration of a blind eye, or a diseased eye, or a closed eye, all of which no doubt might find some analogy with the spiritual vision of men in certain circumstances. But the specific idea brought before us here is that of an evil eye,—an eye which is not single, and because of which the whole body may be full of darkness, or, what is just as bad, may be deluded by a deceptive, double,

and dishonest light. And, in order clearly to understand the figure, it is necessary, I repeat, to bear in mind that the evil eye is produced by what I have called the light within us. Nature is in general honest and true. It has illusions, but no delusions. The external light therefore is faithful, and deceives no one. But the moral or inward light is altogether different, and very often produces a truly evil eye. Thus, to explain what I mean : when the inward light is pure, when our heart is honest and sincere and guileless, when its aim is really to see the truth and to know what is right, then the eye will be single, and the body full of light. But if, on the contrary, the light within us,—our desires and passions and affections,—be evil, that will affect our vision so that we shall never really see the truth, and our very light, our means of seeing, will minister to the darkness within us. So when Eve, under the guileful persuasion of the serpent, looked on the forbidden tree, she saw that it was fair and good for food, and a tree to be desired to make one wise. The woman looked not with a single eye. The inward desire had altogether changed the character of that which she saw without. The light within her was truly darkness. So, in like manner, when we cherish anger, or malice, or suspicion, or unkindness towards each other, the presence of such feelings produces such distorted views that even the most friendly conduct begins to wear a sinister appearance, because it is looked on by an evil eye. The light within us is darkness, consequently we do not see the real truth

when we look at the conduct of those whom we so distrust or dislike. We gaze through a medium of passion, or prejudice, which distorts their whole behaviour, and fills us with utterly false impressions of them and of their conduct. It is the same also with those who are not single-minded, but who would fain reconcile opposite and contradictory ends, who feel they ought to do one thing, and yet wish to do the very reverse; and the effort to accomplish both the duty and the desire destroys, as it were, the proper focus of vision, so that they never see aright, and things never wear to them their proper meaning and proportion. The light which is in them being dark or double, darkens and distorts all they look upon.

Now, bearing these things in mind, let us see how they fit into and explain the doctrine our Lord is expounding. I have said that the illustration has a two-fold reference. It bears on what went before, and also on what follows. If we lay up treasures on earth, that will produce an evil eye; if we try to serve God and mammon, that will destroy the single eye. Look at the passage in both these aspects:—

1st, If the light within you be true, if it be your real heart's desire to see what is right, if your affections are set on those things which are just and pure and lovely, the things heavenly and eternal, then shall your eye be single, and as ye look forth on the world, ye shall be able to estimate its treasures at their proper value, for they will have lost to you the glamour and the fascination which they exercise over

others. Their inherent emptiness, their essential vanity, their utter precariousness, their certain brevity, will be all naked and open to the clear vision of faith, which sees them in their true character, and values them at their proper worth. In short, if you get the heart in the right place, and fill it with right thoughts, then shall the spiritual eye pierce right through all the delusions of sense, and ye shall not be led captive by the spirit and power of the world. That is the blessed result of possessing a single eye. But if, on the contrary, the eye be evil—that is to say, if the light within us is darkness; if we love the world and the things of the world; oh how great shall that darkness be! For when the worldly man looks out even on spiritual things, to his gross nature they are no longer spiritual, but earthly and carnal. Even the most pure and holy and divinest treasures become debased by the evil eye; for nothing is of value to such a man except what is sensual and gross. He does not want the praise of God; he does not want the glory of God; he does not want the love of God; he does not want to be like God. Things divine are not what he wishes, and therefore he does not see them. His carnal heart is blinded by the lusts of this world; and so the light within him is verily darkness. He perceives nothing really desirable except the wealth and honour and pleasure of this earth, for his foolish heart is darkened, and darkens all it sees. It is in this respect with the things of God, just as it falls out with human affairs, when we yield ourselves to pride or selfishness, or jealousy or wrath. He who is under the influence of such passions turns

the light into darkness, for he does not really want to see the truth. There is a falsehood in him, and that falsehood glozes all his neighbour's conduct. In like manner, the worldliness and fleshliness of our hearts pervert the whole things and ways of God. There is a bewildering veil on our eyes, through which we cannot penetrate. The natural man, the fleshly, earthly man, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. The only things that appear to such a man of any worth whatever, are those treasures which moth and rust do corrupt, and thieves can break through to steal; for the light within him is darkness, and how great is that darkness, when the soul is utterly blinded to the riches incorruptible and eternal! But

2d, Let me draw your attention more particularly to the evil eye, as it is produced by the effort to serve both God and mammon. On the whole, in a Christian community like this, where it is the almost universal custom to make at least some profession of religion, and where at the same time the worship of mammon holds, to say the least of it, no mean or obscure position; in such a place, by far the most common, and therefore the most dangerous snare, is that which arises from the effort to combine these two opposite and contradictory objects. Very few among us would feel at ease to cast off religion altogether. Very few even could be satisfied without a considerable amount of proper religious service, such as is generally reckoned acceptable to God. An entire and unmitigated worldliness would

not be tolerable to very many among us, who, nevertheless, are essentially of the earth, earthy. They could not deny God ; they would not altogether forget God ; they admit that He has claims which it were neither right nor safe to overlook altogether. Therefore they are quite willing to do many things which God would have them to do ; and in fact without doing those things regularly, and as befits their position and character, they would by no means feel at ease in their minds. Up to a certain point there is a homage of acknowledged fealty to Him, which conscience will not permit them to neglect, and in which they feel no little comfort and satisfaction. So they pray after a sort, and say truly enough that they could not live without prayer. They give alms to the poor, and do not grudge their charities. They are regular in church-going, and greatly cherish the word of the grace of Christ Jesus. Moreover, as beseems those who hold a position of such religious respectability, they live pure and upright lives, denying those sinful lusts that war against the soul. And in all this religious observance they find not a little comfort and peace and joy. And yet all these things may be only the conditions of an elaborate compromise between godliness and worldliness. They have not given up the world, and they cannot give it up. And when I speak of giving up the world, I repeat what I said formerly, that this does not mean that they should denude themselves of wealth, or turn aside from the ways of prosperous industry, and adopt a life of voluntary and artificial poverty. The

Lord lays down no such law. I do indeed assuredly believe that the terrible contrast presented in our modern civilisation between a bloated and overgrown wealth, and the squalor and misery of our extremest poverty, is inconsistent with the true spirit of Christianity; and that when the gospel, the kingdom of God, is fully established among us, it will greatly lessen, or altogether remove, this which is the shame and reproach of our land. Still, the Lord does not, as I have said, call his followers to any enforced rule of poverty. Their treasures may increase; their barns may be full; the very blessing of God may be on their basket and their store. But what He does demand, and what the men I am speaking of will by no means grant, is that their hearts should be really his; that their affections should be supremely set on the things unseen and eternal; that the kingdom of God and his righteousness should be the first and foremost object of all their desires and efforts. And it is perfectly compatible with a large amount of appointed religious observance, and with a certain amount of so-called religious anxiety and comfort, to cherish nevertheless a true and even inveterate and ineradicable worldliness. For at the bottom of their hearts, and in the deepest springs of motive and character, there lies, and if they took any pains, or indeed honestly desired to ascertain the truth, they might readily know that there lies, a far more intense desire, a more eager hankering for the perishable treasures of this earth, than they ever felt, or can feel for the things unseen and eternal. Let them only pause for a little

and search into their own souls, and they will find that the object they are really living for, and grasping with the eagerness and tenacity as of a drowning man, is essentially the world's wealth, the world's good opinion, the world's honours, the vanities and fripperies, the gilding and gewgaws of a world that is soon to pass away from us all ; and if they were at this moment constrained, like the rich young man in the Gospel, to make clear and decisive and unmistakable choice between God and mammon, they might be very sorry, but in their heart of hearts they would rather give up God than the world. For, in point of fact, their religion, in which they will tell you they find so much comfort, is properly quite a superficial matter, a sort of mild anodyne of piety rubbed into the conscience to soothe its irritation ; but the real lord and master of their souls is the world which they love so well.

Now, the effect of this double and deceitful course is to produce an evil eye of the very worst kind. The influence of utter and unmitigated worldliness, when a man gives himself heartily and without scruple or drawback to that, is, as we have seen, to blind his mind altogether to the higher concerns of the spiritual world. Therefore he never troubles himself about them ; can see no need of them, and no value in them. That is a sad state of darkness, but it is a sort of honest darkness, and is consistent with a certain genuineness of character. But the effort to serve both God and mammon produces a kind of self-deception, which is to my mind greatly more pernicious, and worse to overcome than

the former. The thorough worldling knows himself to be so, and his evil eye sees nothing else worth troubling himself about. The other, however, fondly persuades himself that he is not a worldling ; that he is indeed far superior to the worldling : his evil eye sees, in a measure, what is right and good, but only regards it so far as may be necessary to keep his mind easy in its worldliness. Thus the light which is in him serves more effectually the purpose of darkness. It deludes him with the idea that all is well, which, without a little religious observance, he could hardly persuade himself to believe ; so he keeps up the forms of allegiance to God in order to cover the real treason of his heart ; and whether consciously or unconsciously, or only with a half-consciousness of the real state of his affairs, the man blinds himself wilfully to the inherent worldliness of his heart. Now this, I take it, is a state of darkness even more difficult to deal with, and more hard to escape from, than that of the man who has frankly and out and out yielded himself to his carnal mind. It is more deceitful ; it has the germ of hypocrisy in it ; it is not merely ignoring good, but it turns the good to evil ends ; and oh how great is that darkness, when the light within you is made chiefly to serve the purpose of concealing and excusing that darkness ! Yet this perhaps is of all worldliness the most common among us. The evil eye which has lost its singleness of character, and looks to God a little, only that it may cherish the world more tenaciously and more comfortably, that I fear is far from rare in a Christian community like this ; and

the feeling of self-satisfaction which it produces, and the ignorance of one's real condition which it inevitably cherishes, and the hypocrisy which also it fosters, these are even worse to get the better of than the simple and genuine darkness of the worldling. Hence it is, I apprehend with special and emphatic reference to this state of mind, that Jesus follows up his illustration of the evil eye with the solemn intimation, 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.'

Let me therefore, in conclusion, urge upon you this earnest and faithful saying. No servant can serve two masters whose interests are opposed, whose ways are different, whose requirements are essentially contradictory to each other; and such are the relations of God and mammon. For God seeks to exalt men; Mammon to debase them. God wants to save us; mammon to destroy. God sets before us things spiritual and eternal; mammon the things that are seen and temporal. God would have us to love Him with all our hearts; mammon claims the same thing, and knows that he will secure it, if he can only persuade us that it is quite enough to love God a little. They have obviously competing claims, inconsistent with each other, requiring us to choose decisively between them. When two kings are at war with each other, it will not do for the subjects of either to play fast and loose with their allegiance, giving some tokens of professed subjection to the one sovereign, in order to secure his favour, and at the same time claiming all the advantage of entire loyalty to the other. No more may we do this in relation to

God and mammon. We must choose the one and reject the other ; we must frankly and heartily take our side in this solemn quarrel. A half-hearted allegiance will not serve our end, will not please our God. Decisive election has to be made between the one and the other of these masters ; for the one is holy, the other unholy ; the one is heavenly, the other earthly ; the one pure love, the other profoundly selfish ; the one is a deceiver mocking with a show of good, the other is altogether faithful and right and true. Now, a divided service between these two opposing parties, which are also opposing principles, that is clearly and altogether impossible ; for that were as much as to say that you can be at once spiritual and also carnal, holy and unholy, loving and selfish, true and false, heavenly-minded and also earthly. Of course, I know that people try it ; and I also know that no man while he is in the flesh is altogether holy and spiritual, perfect in love and in heavenly-mindedness. No doubt, the regenerated nature is, even in its best estate, a very mingled fabric, an image of gold and clay, not wholly conformed to Christ while it is on earth. But it is one thing to have only imperfectly attained what we are seeking with our whole heart, and it is quite another thing not really to be seeking it with our whole heart. Now this last is what the Lord forbids. He says, and oh ! with what loving tenderness and earnestness he says it, ‘ My son, give me, only give me thine heart. Choose decisively whether you will belong to me or to mammon ; whether you will have earthly perishable treasures, or

the true incorruptible riches ; whether you will serve me, or the world ; whether you will be satisfied in me, or in those things which moth and rust do corrupt.' That is the appeal which God makes to us all. It is essentially a question of the direction of our heart ; whether it is to be set on the attainment of his favour, his life, his joy, which are the true ends of our existence ; or whether it is to be contented with those things which are at once corruptible and corrupting, which perish themselves, and cause us to perish. I beseech you, brethren, to give all earnest heed to this. It is not perhaps what is conventionally called the gospel ; it is rather one of those fundamental questions which underlie all religion, and without the settlement of which no religion of any kind is possible. By the gospel we understand the way of salvation ; God's holy covenant in Christ ; God's gracious provision for quickening and converting and redeeming our souls through the sacrifice of his beloved Son. But ere that glad tidings can be of much avail to us, it has, first of all, to be settled whether we really want to be saved,—whether we are at all prepared to face the first steps towards salvation, or whether we only want the world, and at most to soothe our consciences in seeking the world by so much religion as may be necessary to delude them, and keep them quiet. It is therefore of primary importance to understand that any kind of half-hearted worship, however proper and becoming and respectable, is of no value whatever with the Lord. He will have no divided service ; He will have no respect to the eye that affects to look upwards to him,

yet, with all its real eagerness, gazes down on the earth and its treasures. Verily and for evermore it is true, we cannot serve God and mammon. And yet is not this precisely what the great mass of men among us are steadfastly trying to do? They have, of course, some little forms of worship huddled into odd corners of their life; some approved ceremonies of Divine homage, to be got through as quickly as decency will permit; even, it may be, some passing emotions, light bubbles on the surface of existence soon vanishing, but pleasant enough in their way while they last. But meanwhile the real heart of them, the genuine energy and earnestness of their nature, is given to accumulate riches, and to indulge in vanities of costly apparel, and sumptuous feastings, and rare wines, and ceiled houses, and all the fantastic rivalries of a life of ostentatious display. That is the patent fact, as any one may see. And yet, because the eye is not single, men can so live year after year, and persuade themselves that they are doing their duty to God and to society and to themselves. And if at any time they are uneasy, and feel that all is not quite right, a little more praying and church-going seems only to entitle them to be a little more worldly, for the light within them is darkness through the miserable effort to serve God and mammon. Brethren, I beseech you to take heed and take warning. God will have your real heart, and will be content with nothing less, and can be served by nothing less; and therefore 'ye cannot serve two masters.' Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Ye would never dream of such a thing, but that your eye is evil.

XV.

THE LAW KEPT BY FAITH.

'Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'—MATT. VI. 25-34.

THE remainder of this chapter is occupied with a series of arguments and illustrations, having for their object to deliver our minds from the cares of this world, and to make us seek the Lord as our chiefest good, and trust in Him as our surest help. Jesus had previously exhorted

them to lay up treasure where moth and rust do not corrupt ; and the reason given was, that if they had not their treasure in heaven, neither could heaven be in their hearts. He then warned them, that if they gave their hearts to the world, or even divided them between God and mammon, that would produce an evil eye, blinded by the lusts of this world, or else rendered double, untrue, and deceitful, which is even worse ; and therefore it behoved them to make decisive choice, giving themselves wholly and heartily to the Lord. And now He goes on to enforce this by showing, on the one hand, how unworthy and how unprofitable are those vexing cares which are the chief portion the world gives to its votaries ; and, on the other hand, by reminding us of our heavenly Father, and of the love He has for his children, and the knowledge he has of their wants, and his mindful care to supply all their need out of his rich abundance. Very manifestly, then, the drift and tenor of this part of the discourse is to urge on us the necessity of exercising faith towards God | If we have faith, that is the victory which overcometh the world, whose cares and troubles can only thus be subdued. That is the doctrine which runs through the whole passage. And underneath it, as the ground on which it all rests, is the other thought, ' We ought to have faith, for God is our heavenly Father, and watches over us, and cares for us, and has promised that He will withhold no good thing from them that trust in him.'

And here, before passing on to the detailed consideration of the passage, let me ask you to note two things :

—1st, You see here what is the true nature of faith. It is not a mere belief in certain opinions; the assent of the mind to a certain system of truth. That is no doubt involved in it, for Jesus sets the Lord before us as our Father, and makes that idea the ground of our faith. The scriptural truth concerning God, then, has to be believed in order to the exercise of a real scriptural faith. But that is not all. The belief of such doctrines is not enough, unless it leads to a practical reliance on Him who is thus apprehended by our minds. For faith is trust in God; and that not merely in regard to the great concerns of the soul and its eternity, but also in the common affairs and interests of life. If we believe in the Father whom Christ has revealed, then will our faith manifest itself in a certain elevation of soul, which, living in an abiding converse with things spiritual, shall rise above the cares of life, because it has an assured trust in God's common providence, as well as in His infinite compassions. 2d, It is this practical view of faith which Christ generally presents, while His apostles rather deal with it in its properly doctrinal aspect. I ask you to observe this, because it has been sometimes asserted that the teaching of our Lord and that of His apostles do not harmonize well, inasmuch as the one is continually insisting on works, while the others mainly enforce the necessity of faith. Now, there is no doubt that, viewed superficially, there is such a contrast between them. The prominent idea of this sermon, and of all our Lord's words, is that of duty, truth, charity; and it is equally certain that

Self. of Faith

the apostles gave a like prominence to the idea of faith. But there is no contradiction between them. They have not a different spirit in them. For faith is at once the belief of certain truths, and also a life practically ordered by these truths ; and all the difference between the two kinds of teaching is that the one says, 'Do this,' but manifestly goes on the assumption that it can only be done by faith ; while the other says, 'Have faith,' but just as manifestly assumes that the faith is to be wrought out in works. In short, it is exactly the same thing with which they deal, only regarded from different points of view. Christ shows what the Lord requires of us, and that faith is necessary for it. The apostles show what that faith is, which is necessary in order to do what the Lord requires of us. The one is the practical view guided by perfect knowledge ; the other is the scientific view leading to perfect accomplishment ; and without this twofold presentation of it, the truth would not have had the completeness and the power which it now possesses. Well for us then that, at sundry times and in these diverse manners, God hath spoken to us by His Son and His servants.

Bearing these things in mind, then, you will now observe that in verses 25 and 26 we have an argument against giving place to the cares of this world, on the ground that they are unworthy of an immortal being like man ; and also an illustration pointedly leading to the exercise of faith. Perhaps the line of thought here will become clearer, if you suppose that the Lord is dealing with an imaginary objection to what He has

just said. 'Ah!' some one might reply, 'no doubt it would be well for us all to set our affections wholly on things above; well, to give up our whole hearts to God. But a man must live, and he must live by bread, and he must be clothed too with suitable apparel; and it is easy to say, Be not careful about these things. But in point of fact, it is not possible. We can't help it. Such anxiety is inevitable. If our hearts were always in heaven, we should soon be bankrupt alike of means and credit on earth.' Thus you can easily imagine some one of His hearers thinking within himself; and He who knew what was in man, virtually replies now to such a thought as this. Observe, then, the precise (matter with which our Lord is here dealing. It is not the question whether a man is to work for daily bread, or to sit down in idleness, and trust that God will provide for him. What the Lord giveth, brethren, that we must gather by diligent toil, earning bread ever by the sweat of our brow. There is no question as to the necessity and duty of labour, to provide those things which are needful. It is fully admitted that, while a man lives, he must have food and raiment, and must work to obtain them both. What Christ argues against is the thought and engrossing care which are bestowed on these things, the anxiety to get what is requisite, and even to store up more than is required, by reason of which we so often forget the high eternal interests of the soul. And here let me say that, in dealing with these worldly cares, while it is true that He would have us, if possible, to cast them away altogether; while

it is clearly implied that a true and perfect faith will rise superior to them; yet Jesus does not sharply and unsympathizingly denounce them, as if in no circumstances there could be any kind of excuse, or at least palliation for them. (Ah! He is very faithful; but He is also very tender. His argument goes to show that such cares ought not at any rate to engross our whole minds; but that is all. It is as if He had said: 'I know how difficult it is to get rid of those anxieties altogether. I would not bear hard on the poor man, troubled about daily bread for his household. But if ye have enough, why set your hearts on more? And in any case, why give your whole thought to worldly anxieties? Is not the life more than meat? Is not the body more than raiment? Have you not a mind to be filled with wisdom, a heart to be trained for heaven, a soul to be saved from death, and a body, too, which is not to be pampered and adorned, but to be prepared for an habitation of God? Why are you always thinking then about food and raiment? Why is all your care to lay up store of these? Is it worthy of a being, endowed with such a gift of immortality, to become the slave and the victim of fleshly lusts and worldly cares? I can understand how hard it is for the poor altogether to shake off the pressing anxieties of this life; but I can have no excuse for those who are ever anxious to heap up riches, or for those who are only thinking what they shall eat, and what they shall drink, and where-withal they shall be clothed. For life is more than meat; life is the favour of God; life is the peace of

God; life is the fellowship of God, walking in the light of things unseen and eternal. And oh what is to become of you, if your thought and care are given to these earthly matters only, as if the great duty of life was to get abundance of bread and variety of raiment? 'What a poor mean life that is, brethren, and yet how common! a life full of cares, weary and burdened with cares, and yet all its thoughts are about food and clothing, or the means of getting them in needless abundance and superfluity. Think of an immortal being, meant to have fellowship with God, giving himself up to the pursuit of such things, anxious only to secure them, and fretting himself about them, as if the great end of his existence were to eat and drink and array himself in sumptuous apparel! Surely it was fitting that Christ should say, 'Life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.'

Very beautiful now is the illustration with which this argument is followed up, and which rises from the negative to the positive, from the putting away of cares to a quiet trust in God. 'Look,' he says, 'and consider the fowls of the air. They sow not, neither do they reap; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better, of more value to Him, than they?' Again let me remind you that the question before the Lord was not whether we should be as idle as the birds, but only whether we should like them cast off care, and trust our heavenly Father. Toil is man's lot. He must sow and reap. We cannot expect the daily manna, unless we go and gather it. The argument is not

thinking add one cubit to your stature; and at any rate, if ye would but trust in God, you should find that He who clothes the lilies will also clothe you.' With the exception of one single point, there is very little difference in the line of thought here from what went before, so that it will not require very lengthened exposition. The one point of distinction is, that whereas in the former case ¹Christ would have us to regard such cares as unworthy of an immortal being, in the present instance he rather ²puts forward their utter uselessness. People say, We cannot help these anxieties; Christ says, They do you no earthly good. We work for daily food and raiment, and our work will ordinarily secure them. But when we add care to work, there is no additional profit arising from the care. In fact, it has no result, except to turn our hearts away from God. I know, my friends, how hard it is to persuade ourselves that this is literally the case; and how hard it is, even when we are so persuaded, to act on the conviction. Yet I do entreat you to consider the word of the Lord here. Which of you by thinking can add one cubit to his stature? Will all your anxiety multiply a grain of corn, or clothe you with another raiment? And if it is really unavailing, why fret and vex your soul? why eat your heart day after day? why not strive at least to cast your burden on the Lord? Consider the lilies of the field. They toil not, neither do they spin; they have no care about their clothing and adornments; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. It is not care that adorns them; it is God. Care, if they could

feel it, would only fret and spoil their beauty. Yet, little precious as they are, springing and blooming to-day, to-morrow dry and withered and only fit for fuel to the fire, see how the Lord arrays them with splendour that kings cannot rival! Now, ye are the children of the Highest, immortal and beloved; and what ye need, and what is good for you, surely the Lord will give. For you He gave up the Son of love; for you He planned in the counsels of eternity wondrous schemes of grace and truth. Shall He not with Christ also freely give you all things? Why fret, then, with unavailing cares? why vex your souls with unprofitable anxieties? why not turn away from such useless thoughts, to grasp and to realize an assured confidence in God who giveth us all things richly to enjoy? Verily your heavenly Father knoweth ye have need of these things; and what is good the Lord will give; for the lion's young may be hungry and lack food, but they that trust in the Lord shall not lack any good thing.

The Lord exhorts us to seek, first, the kingdom of God and his righteousness. This is the pith and kernel of the whole matter. I had almost omitted one allusion; that, namely, to the Gentile spirit. Let me just note it here in passing. Having warned us against the worldly anxieties which, alas! are so froward and engrossing, Jesus adds, 'after all these things do the Gentiles seek.' What He means, is that they did not know the Father in heaven,—did not know of His bountiful kindness and plenteous care; and therefore it was not strange that they set their hearts on such

perishable treasures, and filled their hearts with such unworthy and unprofitable cares. But those who had received the gospel of the kingdom ought to show a different spirit. It was not for them to be as the poor Gentiles who knew not the Father; it was for them, with a due estimate of the importance of higher concerns, to seek with all their hearts, and before all other things, the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and it was for them to trust with a tranquil assurance that all other things needful should be added therewith. This then, as I have said, is the heart and kernel of the whole matter. Let us see what precisely it means.

Our Lord speaks of Himself as a king; and the realm over which He was to reign, He calls the kingdom of God; and He said to Pilate that this kingdom was not of this world. The Sovereign of that kingdom then stood quite apart and aloof from the princes of the Gentiles; He had different objects to accomplish, and diverse means for accomplishing them; and the establishment of his royal power left to them the free and unimpeded exercise of all their legitimate authority. In general, therefore, when Christ speaks of the kingdom of God, it is to this that He refers, the Church visible and invisible, the spiritual redeemed flock, and the society organized for their edification. But in the particular case now before us, it appears to me that the phrase is used in a somewhat more limited sense. So also with regard to the term 'the righteousness of God.' That is commonly applied, at least by the apostles, to the imputed

righteousness of Christ, in virtue of which the believer is justified, and accepted of God. But though it is our duty surely to seek that with our whole heart, and to make it our foremost concern to win Christ, and be found in Him, not having our own righteousness, but the righteousness of God which is by faith unto and upon all them that believe; yet I am persuaded that is not the precise idea which our Lord means here to convey. This is not a question of doctrine, but of interpretation. The kingdom of God, and the righteousness of God have in other passages of Scripture the meaning already ascribed to them; but their exact purport in this particular text must be gathered from the general drift and bearing of the discourse.

Now our Lord has been entreating His followers to lay up for themselves spiritual treasures,—treasures in heaven. He has also been warning them against the cares of this world,—cares about meat and drink and raiment. And He has finally been telling them that their heavenly Father knows all their state, and provides for all their need, so that they have sure grounds for trusting implicitly in His mindfulness and faithfulness. It is in these sayings then that we must seek the key to the concluding word, ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.’ What He means is that they are not to set their hearts on the kingdom, the possessions of this world, its riches and honours, and pampering indulgences and vain displays; neither are they to vex their hearts with cares concerning these, as the Gentiles do, sinking thereby into a like degradation

with them ; but they are to make it their foremost object to obtain spiritual treasures, meekness, temperance, patience, faith, love, and all things just and true and honest and pure and lovely, which are the true riches and real honours of man,—the only dignities acknowledged in the kingdom of God. Now the way to obtain these is through faith in God and his Christ. Their great effort therefore should be to believe that God reigns, and to trust in Him with a most loyal and unswerving devotion. This is obviously what is here meant by seeking the kingdom of God. The idea is limited by the context to this, that instead of seeking the world's possessions and relying on its powers, we should above all strive to realize that God reigns, and that it is our great concern to become the subjects of his kingdom, doing his will, and trusting in his fatherly care. And so also the righteousness of God referred to here is restricted in the very same way. It is the righteousness of his government, his all-holy and wise administration, which we are to cherish with a steadfast faith. Virtually, the Lord says, 'Seek ye the things of the Divine kingdom, and trust in the provision of the Divine king ; and hold fast your confidence in his righteousness and truth.' If He ask you thus to trust in him, and to be careful for nothing, be sure that He is faithful and just, and ye shall not be the losers by so doing. Trust in his righteousness. True, his ways are not as our ways. That righteousness is not to be measured by our standard. It is not man's righteousness, but God's ; yet for that reason, though it may at times

appear strange, it is only strange because of its unsearchable perfection and glory. Therefore, rest assured of it, all other things which are needful for you and would be good for you, will be added, will be thrown as it were into the bargain, provided ye are thus seeking with earnest faith to rely on God's kingdom and righteousness. Brethren, that seems to me obviously the drift of the argument here; and assuming that it is so, consider now what a noble career Christ calls you to enter on. Ah! how poor and mean life is when it is penetrated by a mere worldly spirit,—to spend the riches and strength of our souls, gathering up a biggish heap of gold, or stuffing sweet morsels into an overloaded belly, or muddling the thoughtful brain with the fumes of superfluous wine, or adorning our bodies, like children, with vanities of gay apparel, or strutting in the poor dignities and honours which are but empty breath; to do that, nay, not only to do it, but to yield our hearts to a weary servitude of care and anxiety and fear and trouble for no other purpose than to get such things, and to find that all our better nature is degraded by the process and sinking to so mean a level that we cannot help despising ourselves as the pitiful victims of poor and sordid desires; ah! brethren, surely that is a true word of the Lord's which calls this no better than a Gentile, heathenish life, wholly unworthy the children of the kingdom. Contrast this, now, with the career to which He calls you, and in which His grace will sustain you. The subjects of His kingdom are to seek, and they shall verily get knowledge and wisdom in Christ

Contrast

whereby their minds are exalted unto a high converse with God ; and grace and truth in Christ, whereby their hearts are purified and rejoice in the fellowship of God ; and mercy and peace in Christ, whereby their conscience is delivered from the trouble and terror of its guilty apprehension ; and love and hope in Christ, whereby their souls are gladdened with fountains of living water flowing into everlasting life ; and instead of fear and care and brooding anxiety, through trust in their heavenly Father they are kept like the stars around His throne, wheeling in a path of clear and stately serenity above the storms of life ; for though they have their tribulations, they can rejoice in the midst of them, knowing that all things work together for their good, and feeling that there is a growth of nobleness and purity and Christ-likeness in them, whose exceeding weight of glory and blessedness far more than compensates for their light afflictions which are but for a day. Oh brethren, I beseech you, weigh well the life of worldliness, and the life of faith,—the kingdom and possessions of men against the kingdom and righteousness of God ; and as ye consider the mean, poor, perishable, weary, and disappointing results of the one, whose end is at once self-contempt and despair, bethink you of the Divine sweetness and purity and dignity and peace of the other, with its crown of glory and joy at last ; and hearken to the faithful voice that crieth to you, ‘ Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.’

*life of worldliness
Faith
one is life*

Then shall ye be able to comprehend the concluding words, 'Why take ye thought for to-morrow?' I need hardly, after all I have already said, remind you that there is nothing in this opposed to the making of a reasonable provision for one's old age, or for one's children, such as common prudence suggests. People sometimes use, at any rate they once used, this text, to oppose all such arrangements as are provided by insurance companies, in the event of death or infirmity, to lessen the evils of life. Of course, they might as well say that it is wrong to lay by anything for the future, and that a man ought to spend, day by day, what he earns day by day, which were alike unwise and wicked. What is here forbidden is, not the prudence which makes reasonable provision for the future, but the care which embitters the present with anxieties about the future. And this is forbidden because a true faith in God implies that, alike for present and future, we should trust Him to provide what is needful, while we look to the things unseen. Ah! this anxiety about the future, this taking thought for to-morrow, operates as an immense deadweight against the power of the gospel. It is just as if we thought there might be no God to-morrow to look after us, and therefore we must lay up store to do without Him. How different from the spirit of that petition, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' I beseech you, brethren, to be on your guard against it. It belongs essentially to the kingdom of this world, not to the kingdom of God. Let it be your great object then to seek, first and foremost, and above

all things, faith in God, faith in His fatherly care, faith in His righteousness and truth ; and take no thought for to-morrow, for He who provides for to-day will be mindful of your returning wants, and will supply all your need out of His riches, and do for you exceeding abundantly above all that ye could ask or think.

XVI.

THE LAW KEPT BY FAITH.

'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?'—MATT. VII. 7-11.

IF I have rightly traced the main lines of thought running through this great Sermon, then there must have been some displacement of the passage we have read for lecture to-day. For obviously it has little or no affinity with the injunctions that immediately precede it, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged,' 'Give not that which is holy unto dogs.' There is no common principle that will harmonize it with these sayings, so as to produce the impression of natural consequent speech. But if we transpose these verses so as to connect them with the close of chapter vi., they fall most naturally into the train of thought there. Indeed, there is so close an organic relationship that

the exhortation to trust our heavenly Father would be incomplete without this subsequent exhortation to prayer. We are to believe, but we are also to ask; and we are to ask, just because we believe. It is true that the Father knows what things we have need of, before we ask them. He does not need to be informed of our wants, or reminded to supply them. But it is part of the confidence which a child reposes in a parent, that it shall go to him with all its desires. To conceal them, would be to distrust him. Prayer therefore is the natural outcome of faith; and the man who 'takes no thought for the morrow' is just the man who gets his daily bread by daily prayer to the Father.

In order to persuade us then to this confiding intercourse, our Lord assures us here that if we ask, we shall receive; if we seek, we shall find; if we knock, it shall be opened unto us. He asserts, in short, the real efficacy of prayer, in the most clear and decisive terms. And that we may steadfastly believe this, He institutes a comparison between our earthly fathers and our heavenly Father, not only taking that relationship for granted, but assuming that our parents according to the flesh are in reality but a faint emblem of the still more perfect Fatherhood of God. Hence He reasons that, by how much our heavenly Father transcends them in the excellence of His Divine nature, by so much He also surpasses them in the affluence of His paternal benignity. They do not close their ears to the cry of their children; and still less will He. They would not willingly disappoint our desires; and still

less will He. They know what gifts are good to bestow, and rejoice to bestow them ; and still more does He. They would not give a stone for an egg, or a serpent for a fish ; and still less will He. He is infinitely higher than they are ; but His are infinite moral perfections of the very same kind. Such is the drift of our Lord's argument here, which with this simple, yet profound analogy sheds a clear light down into the depths and mysteries of prayer, where the mere reasoning intellect would vainly go sounding and sounding, and finding no bottom to its thoughts.

1. Our Lord enjoins us here to pray, and He assures us that we shall not pray in vain : 'Ask, and ye shall receive ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' Clearly it is implied that prayer is effectual in bringing about the accomplishment of our desires. It does not indeed follow that God will grant any and every thing that we may choose to ask ; for there are some things which, without irreverence, we may truly say it is impossible for Him to bestow. But our Lord's words do involve that prayer is not merely effectual in producing a devout frame of mind, but also in securing, to some extent, the object of our requests. Now I could not hope, in a single paragraph, to do anything like justice to the many nice and difficult questions that gather around this subject. Neither is it right to treat them slightly, as if those who profess to be perplexed by them were only shallow triflers, to be pooh-poohed as unworthy of serious refutation. For thoughtful and earnest men are feeling

the pressure of these difficulties, and it is our business to meet them, not with denunciations, but with light, if any light we have to shed upon the matter. I cannot then do at present all that I should like to do; but neither can I altogether pass those questions by. They are not new, though they have received somewhat new forms and new force from the progress of scientific thought in these years. Long ages ago, the theologian and the philosopher had to deal with the very same perplexing inquiries, only with this difference, that then the difficulty was suggested by the absolute decrees of a personal God, whereas now it arises rather from the fixed, unalterable character of natural law. Formerly the question was put in this shape: If God has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass, which accords with the doctrine of Scripture, and also with the idea of His absolute Being, what profit can there be in prayer, for nothing can alter the purpose of His will? At present it rather assumes this form: Everything is the result of law, and no entreaties of ours can arrest the operation of such law, or anywise change the effect which an infinite series of causes have conspired to produce. Both agree that prayer is therefore ineffectual to accomplish the object desired; though both might also allow that, as a devout exercise, it was not without a wholesome influence on the mind.

Now, allow me to say that, in maintaining what I hold to be the essential truth on this subject, people have sometimes undervalued this spiritual effect which, on any theory, prayer is still allowed to possess. I am

not sure, indeed, that it would long continue to wield its hallowed influence over the soul, if men generally adopted either of those views I have mentioned. Nay, I question if they would pray at all, when they had learned that they must ask without any hope of obtaining their requests. Still I am ready to admit that the inward spiritual result of prayer may be of more value than the granting of many things which we are fain to ask. It is not in vain, therefore, so long as it solemnizes the mind, and helps us to trust in God, and to submit to His will. Yet I cannot think that that is all the result of it. I grant at once that it were idle to ask the Lord to alter His determined purpose; for He is without variableness or shadow of turning. I grant also that there are some things which men might be foolish enough to ask, but which God cannot possibly bestow. The child cries for the moon, but the moon could not be given to it. Even omnipotence is unable to work absurdities; and grown men, ignorant as children of much that lies beyond the province of their thought and observation, may seek perchance as unwisely as the witless child. I grant also, moreover, that we have no right to pray for the arrest or reversal of any of the laws of nature. All that may be freely allowed; and yet there remains a province in which } prayer shall not be in vain. For surely there is a region in which the laws of nature and the purposes of God are manifestly conditioned by the activities of men. The sun shines, and the rain falls, but the effect they will produce on the earth depends on the human industry

that ploughs the glebe, and sows the corn. And if such relations exist between the operations of natural law and the free activities of man, I cannot see, on any grounds of reason, why there should not be a field, and a very wide one too, in which events are, as it were, held in solution, waiting, in like manner, for the intervention of prayer, in order to precipitate the desired result. If room is left for human work to be necessary and effectual, there seems no greater difficulty in leaving a similar opportunity for human prayer. And in accordance with this, it is to be remembered that the Christian does not in reality ask that God would be pleased to change His purposes, or to arrest His laws. The foundation of our prayers is the Divine promises. The Lord has issued, if we may so speak, a series of voluntary engagements, which it is presumed He would not send into circulation, unless He knew that He could implement them when they were presented. Now, it seems to be an element of His plan that these promises should not ordinarily be fulfilled until they are thus pleaded. We do not therefore ask Him to alter His purposes, but only to fulfil His promises, which is quite a different thing. The one is wholly incompatible with His character, and the other is just as entirely essential to it. It is possible, of course, that men may ask what He has never promised ; and though I do not say that even some such requests may not be grateful to Him, as proofs of their faith, yet neither do I say that they will be granted. But of all those things which God has promised to His believing people, it seems but

reasonable, as well as scriptural, to say that 'every one that asketh, receiveth them ; and he that seeketh, findeth ; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.' So 'the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much.' But—

2. For the perfect assurance of our minds on this subject, it is to be remembered that this whole question rests on the Fatherhood of God ; and unless we hold fast by that, the grace and truth of our Lord's saying here will soon vanish from our minds. In former times, theology sometimes represented the most high God as little else than a kind of awful Fate, fettered by His own fore-ordained decrees, able indeed to hear, but scarcely, at least in no very clear way, able to help His people. In these years, now, science is fain to offer us a God still more impotent in His omnipotence ; a mere cold abstraction, a blind force, working without conscious plan or moral emotion, and of course as deaf to prayer as the sea to the drowning cry of its victims. Now, it is quite true that God is the author of that wondrous order which pervades all the universe, and that the entire procession of events was fixed in Eternal wisdom, and also that everything is brought about by the action of natural law, which last is as much a part of the Divine plan as any purpose that His wisdom hath ordained. You cannot be wrong in believing these things ; but you may be wrong in thinking that you can so understand, and apply them as to be able to say what is consistent with His nature, and what is not. These are truths, no doubt ; but morally they are

somewhat barren truths. They are at any rate infinite quantities, with which our reason vainly strives to deal. And to my mind, I confess, it has often been a matter of no little wonder to understand how it is that men are ever found so ready to turn away from the thought of a gracious Father, full of tender sympathy for His children, in order to expatiate in those regions of perilous and mysterious inquiry, where the human heart finds no kindred heart responsive to its longings, but only an omnipotent will, or a cold abstraction, and the impotent logic of inscrutable ideas. I can understand how the lofty mountain, whose lower slopes are covered with fields and vineyards and happy homes, where children play and old men bask in the sun, should rise into bleak regions of sterile grandeur, where there is no hum or trace of living creature. But though it may be well for the curious inquirer to visit those lofty summits once in a way, I cannot comprehend how any one should forsake the happy homes and human sympathies and fruitful fields, and seek a dwelling for himself amid the cold and the silence and the deathliness of those awful peaks and crags. So also the great Divine idea rises, no doubt, if rising it can properly be called, from the homelike and familiar thought of our Father, into lofty and misty conceptions of law and order and purpose, fixed from of old in eternity. But though it be well to hold this for truth, and even occasionally to journey into those regions of inscrutable thought, yet surely it is not wise to forsake the joyful and fruitful revelation of our heavenly Father, and to

think that we get a truer conception of God in those chill abstractions and changeless laws which neither feel our calamities, nor hear our prayers.

For after all is said that can be said, the fountain of all sound theology, of all true religion, of all effectual prayer, is the Fatherhood of God. If I want a simple, yet most profound, system of divinity, I turn to the story of the prodigal son. If I would know what true piety is, I go to that good word of promise, 'Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father.' And if I would know how to pray, I turn to that perfect model which our Lord himself has here bequeathed unto us, and which ye teach your children to pray with folded hands and bended knee,—for the simple piety of childhood clothes itself fitly and beautifully in its hallowed words—but which the ripe and hoary believer, standing at heaven's gate, is also glad to use, for he finds no fitter prayer, so long as prayer is needed, than those simple petitions in which his childish spirit held its first communings with the Lord. For though it is a child's prayer, it is not one which we can ever outgrow. It deepens with our deepening thoughts; and therefore soft lisping voices mingle now, as they have for long centuries mingled, with the richest and deepest experiences of Christian faith, as the whole family of the redeemed cry, 'Our Father which art in heaven.' Now, in that model of all prayer we ask that the Father's name may be hallowed, that the Father's kingdom may come, that the Father's will may be done, that the Father

would give His children their daily bread, their daily pardon, their daily guidance,—for the power and the glory are His. Brethren, this most blessed truth lies at the root of all real prayer. It is all the cry of children to the Father. Therefore Christ came to reveal to us, not a blind force working in an unconscious universe, not even a supreme and arbitrary will, a *person* on whose personality, however, there was nothing to which we could attach any cords of love; but a Father caring for the wants, forgiving the sins, leading the steps of His erring offspring; and no prayer is possible except on this foundation, for there is no loving faith without the Fatherhood of God. Oh take not this thought from me, for then shall I be tongue-tied, and my heart's fountains dried up, and all your frigid theologies will only harden me into stone! True, it is only revealed in Christ, and in Christ only realized; but for this very end He came into the world, that He might proclaim our kindred with the Highest, and our born right to become the sons of God. Therefore it is, brethren, because of this real fatherly disposition of God, that the voice of our human want shall not be unheard, and the cry of our human sorrow shall not be unheeded. There is a chord of most tender sympathy in the Father's heart, to which we may appeal with even more assured confidence than to any earthly parents. They may be ignorant, but He knows all our need; they may be indifferent, but He is compassionate and loving; they may be selfish, but He seeks only our good; they may turn their hearts away, but He never changes. A

mother may forget her sucking child. Mothers there have been who slept through the long night-watches, and heard not the wailing babe that was dying on their bosom ; but He slumbereth not nor sleepeth, and the faintest moan of a childlike heart will find an ever-loving sympathy responsive to its cry. He is not indifferent to our wants. If you ask for bread, He will not mock you with a stone ; if you ask for a fish, He will not cheat you with a serpent ; if you ask for an egg, he will not hurt you with a scorpion. He will not reply to the prayers of His children either with mockeries, or delusions, or gifts of harmful import. Only let us take care that our prayer be real ; for verily the answer will be as real as the prayer. But alas ! we say ' Our Father ' with no feeling of children, and no faith in Him. We make duty prayers, because it is right ; formal prayers, because it is customary ; word prayers, because they are elegant ;—mockeries all of them ! and no wonder that they return to our own bosom. For unless we come in the faith and love of children to their Father, we might as well be dumb, like the prayerless atheist who holds the throne of heaven to be vacant and impotent, as indeed it virtually is if there be not a Father there to hear us.

3. While prayer is thus effectual because it is made to a Father who feels with us and is willing to help us, we are not to suppose that everything we ask of Him shall be given to us, neither should we murmur when our requests are refused. ! It is well to ask of Him, but not to dictate to Him. He will withhold no good thing

from them that fear Him, but then He knows better than we do what it is good to give; and sometimes the best answer to our requests is in reality to deny them. We ask and receive not, because we ask amiss. Your child seeks somewhat which it were not meet for you to give, nor fit for it to get; and perhaps it falls into a passion of grief at being refused. Yet you will not yield to its unwise desire. You are sorry at its disappointment; you remonstrate with its folly; but you know it would be greater folly in you to yield to it. So a witless babe may be eager to lay hold of the shining serpent in the grass, not knowing its venom; but it would not be like a father to let it have its way. You would never give a serpent for a fish, though you might be ready enough to give the fish in room of the serpent. A hungry child may cry for bread, and you would never give it a stone instead; but if it clamour for the precious stone on your finger, you may try to content it with a bit of bread, but you will not grant its wish; for to you the stone is a jewel of price, and to the babe it were but a toy, to please for a moment and be lost. It is the child's part, then, to submit to a father's better wisdom, and be thankful if it gets the egg when it seeks the scorpion. Now, we are but as children here, ignorant of the real qualities of many things, taken with the glitter of others, and like enough to ask for a boon what would be far from a blessing. Therefore it behoves us ever to school our hearts to say, 'Not as we will, but as Thou wilt.' For does not your own experience bear me out when I say, that if you had gotten all you

ever asked, if things were wholly controlled, not by the Father's better wisdom, but by our desires and prayers, life would have presented even a worse and sadder story than it does? In youth you longed for a speedy and triumphant success in life. As you look back now on the past, do you think it would have been well for you if that prayer had been granted, and if you had grown old without the wisdom of trial, and the discipline of trouble and sorrow? In health, you have prayed against the coming of sickness. Yet bethink you now, would it have been good for you, had you never had to lie, and commune with your own heart on a sick-bed before the Lord? Very shallow has that man's life been, and fruitful of little wisdom, who has not learnt that God's dealings with him have been wiser and better than his own plans would have been. Prayer is effectual, but happily it is not always effectual in obtaining our requests. Sometimes, indeed, God grants our desires, and sends leanness into our souls. So Israel hungered for flesh in the desert, and got it to their sorrow. In such a case, prayer is answered rather by judgment than mercy; but that is God's strange work; and more commonly, if we ask amiss, wise love only refuses the request, and wraps up its kindness in the grief or trouble which we are fain to put away from us. And if we only rested with more confidence on the Father's love, and learnt to be more submissive to His better wisdom, I am assured we should oftener discern the answer of prayer than we now do, though it might be sometimes by spiritual gifts when we craved only

for temporal, sometimes by bread when we looked for a stone ; but always far more abundantly than we had asked or thought. The Father is willing to give what is good, far more willing than we are to ask. Not as we will, then, but as He wills. Amen, so let it be.

4. In order to be effectual, our prayers must be real ; but, for the highest efficacy, they must be both real and also spiritual. In St. Matthew's version of this saying, our Lord does not allude to high matters of grace and truth as forming the subject of our requests to God ; but only to common things—eggs and bread and fishes, and the like, which some might suppose to be rather out of place in such a sacred business as prayer. Jesus, however, did not so regard the matter. He speaks in a homely vein ; but there is meaning, and no meanness, in these homely words. He knew that the heavenly Father cares for a sparrow, though it be not worth a farthing, and provides for the raven, though it be worth even less. A parent may feel a special interest in the higher culture and spiritual wellbeing of his child ; but he will also care for its common food and raiment. If your sick child cry to you for a cup of cold water, that cry will touch your heart, for it is the expression of a real want, and a felt dependence on your care. And so, too, the heavenly Father is not above listening to our lowliest necessities ; nor should we be above asking that which He is willing to grant. I draw your attention to this, because I cannot help thinking that a deal of our praying is fruitless, because it is not

real. How comes it, for instance, that whenever a man betakes himself to this exercise, straightway all individuality of character seems to disappear, and every one asks for the same evangelical blessings in the same evangelical phrases? Are all alike heavenly-minded? Are all equally longing for God, the living God? Does not this universal appearance of spirituality suggest some suspicion of the reality of such prayers? What, if we have formed to ourselves a fixed idea of what proper prayer should be, of the spiritual subjects it should deal with, and the scriptural phrases it should be expressed in, so that we are less anxious to be real in point of fact than evangelical in point of form, and our supplications tell more of our theological opinions than they do of the actual wants of our souls? Do not suppose that we would wish men to be less spiritual in their desires. God forbid. Sad it is to think how our souls cleave to the dust; how earthly we still are; how little we hunger for the bread of life. But just because there is in reality so little true spiritual desire among us, I deprecate the fostering of a delusive appearance of it, and would far rather hear men pleading for bread and eggs and fishes, and such commonplace matters, the want of which they do feel, than to be palming upon themselves a counterfeit and simulated spirituality for which, in the bottom of their hearts, they have no care at all. Brethren, the very first requisite of prayer is that it be real, the feeling of a real want, and the faith of a real dependence upon God. That is the prime essential quality of it, without which it is

idle as the passing wind. 'If the heart be smitten with a lofty desire, then, lofty as its nature is, let it speak in a kindred strain, and surely the Father will rejoice to hear it. But if humbler in its thoughts, and coarser in its grain, then let its cry be according to its homelier feelings, —like the young bird in the nest, opening its mouth as yet not for music, but only for crumbs. The Father will hear the real cry of His children however lowly their wants, and He may answer it in a way that shall lead on to better things; but that which rises not truly out of our felt need is a very mockery, however high and sacred its apparent longing after God. Have a care then, brethren, and when ye go to a throne of grace say to your souls, Here, if anywhere, I must be honest and true. Better to pray honestly for the eggs and bread and fishes which I do need, and feel that I need, than pretend to ask that which at heart I do not desire. Henceforth, whatever else I be, I will be honest before the Lord; for when I have learnt to pray faithfully, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' I may learn also to say sincerely, 'Thy kingdom come.'

So far we gather from the record of St. Matthew a wholesome lesson as to the reality of prayer, being assured that however humble our requests, yet if they be sincere they shall not be unheeded. St. Luke, however, in his version, introduces another element, and one about which we can speak with greater decision and confidence: 'If your earthly fathers know to give good gifts unto their children; how much more shall the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask

Him ?' Now, as to all the former subjects of prayer, to which we have alluded, we have been compelled to admit that our requests might be granted, or they might not ; but that the refusal ought not to shake our confidence in the efficacy of prayer. A foolish child may ask for that which a wise parent is bound to deny. A sickly appetite may crave for that which a faithful physician will nowise allow. Yet it would be strange reasoning to conclude that therefore all requests were vain when made to parents and physicians. The truest answer to some prayers is, to deny their petition ; yet the faith that may be in them shall bear fruit some way or other, for all that. It is different, however, when we enter into the region of things spiritual ; and, therefore, while I have urged you to be, in the first place, real, I must also remind you that the thoroughly effectual prayer is that which is at once real, and also spiritual. God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. He will not give you something else in reply to that petition ; for that is a boon which can never be amiss. A true father, who is mindful to provide for all the common wants of his children, hath a special care to train them for a wise, dutiful, and noble life. He will grudge nothing that may help in securing that. He will not stint the means that may be necessary for enlarging the mind, for purifying the heart, for strengthening the character, and for elevating the soul to high and generous pursuits. And if it be thus with our earthly fathers, how much more shall the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him ? This is the

most precious boon which God could bestow, but it is also the one which He is ever most ready to bestow. We have to seek it indeed ; but not as if there was any reluctance on His part to grant this most excellent gift, which is the pledge of all other blessings. As I read the gospel, on the contrary, all the unwillingness lies in us ; in our ungodliness, in our love of sin, in our worldliness, in our unwillingness to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. Willingly, therefore, is the Holy Spirit given to them who really desire Him ; and our asking is just the manifestation of that desire. I do not, indeed, say that He is only sent to those who pray for His coming. Happily no. Oftentimes the Lord prevents us with blessing ; giving what we need, though we do not feel our need. At any rate, our requests for this most precious boon are not designed to propitiate any Divine opposition, or to overcome any Divine reluctance ; for the Father already yearns with a most tender paternal solicitude to bestow on His children everything that will really go to prepare them for His fellowship and glory. For this very end Christ came in the flesh and died upon the cross, even to reveal to us the Father by the teaching of His Spirit ; to set us at liberty, by the law of the Spirit ; to cleanse us from sin, by the baptism of the Spirit ; and to make us an habitation of God by His Spirit dwelling in us. The humiliation, the suffering, the entire work of Jesus, had for their great object to assure to every soul, that would accept of His aid, the enlightening, and quickening, and edifying, and comforting agency of the Holy

Ghost; and therefore if He is not sent to us, the only reason for His absence is that we do not want to part with sin, do not want to crucify the flesh, do not want to be conformed unto Christ, but are quite content to slave on in the base drudgery of an ungodly world. Brethren, this is verily the good news of God, even that He does not stand aloof in offended dignity, coldly leaving His erring children to eat the fruit of their own doings, but casts abroad, on all hands, cords of love whereby He may draw us up to Himself, seeking to win our confidence, to melt our hearts, to persuade our minds, to quicken our souls; and lavishing every Divine help, that we may be trained for glory, honour, and immortal life. It is the very joy of the Divine nature, not selfishly to gather up all unto itself, but freely to communicate all blessing to all that are willing to be blessed. Therefore, if our earthly fathers know to give good gifts unto their children, how much more shall the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?

Ask, then, and ye shall receive. It is a proof of faith that ye seek from God those things that ye have need of, as a child goes to its father with all its wants, fully believing that he is able and willing to give what is good. It is a proof of faith also not to murmur when some of our requests are refused; for we in our ignorance often ask amiss, and the Father knoweth best what is meet for Him to give, and good for us to get. It is a special proof of faith that we ask the greatest of all boons, even the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter,

who convinceth of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and who worketh in us unto all well-pleasing. For though one may request a trifle from a passing acquaintance, one shrinks from coming under a lifelong obligation except to a friend, of whose absolute goodwill he has the most convincing assurance. So let us trust the heavenly Father; and while telling him all our wants, and confiding to him all our troubles, and submitting to him in all our disappointments, let us ever remember that in no way can we show a faith that will be so grateful to him as by entreating for that Holy Spirit, who teacheth, and traineth, and purifieth, and perfecteth his redeemed ones for entering into his fellowship, and finally partaking of his glory.

XVII.

THE LAW KEPT BY SYMPATHY.

'Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged : and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye ; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.'—MATT. VII. 1-6.

WE come now to the fourth great division of this Sermon, which is contained in the first twelve verses of this chapter, omitting the passage from verse seven to verse eleven inclusive, which, for the reasons formerly stated, appears to belong to the previous head. The remainder of the chapter, from verse thirteen to the end, I regard as a general peroration, or winding up of the whole subject, with a solemn warning as to the responsibility of those who were privileged to receive such instruction from the Lord.

This fourth division, then, rests upon the idea of moral sympathy. It requires us to imagine ourselves

in the position of those whom we are about to judge, or in any other way to injure, or to profit; and from that point of view, it demands that we should regulate our conduct to them, doing what we should like them to do to us, and refraining from what we should not wish to be done to ourselves. And here, in order once more to have clearly before us the whole drift and bearing of this discourse, let me remind you that the great fundamental idea of the Sermon is to show in what way Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. In illustrating that idea, He lays down four guiding principles, by keeping which carefully in mind the whole scope of the Sermon will be easily remembered. First, there is the Christian spirit of love, which is to embrace all men without restriction or limitation, as laid down in the 44th verse of chapter v.: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.' God's law is not fulfilled if we come short of that true Christ-like spirit of love. Second, there is the great principle of unostentatious sincerity, laid down in chapter vi. verse 3: 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.' God's law is not fulfilled by any kind of hypocrisy or formalism, but only by single-minded simplicity and truth, doing all things as unto God, and not as unto men. Thirdly, there is the high law of faith, which alone overcometh the world, as laid down in the saying, chapter vi. verse 33: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.'

God's law is only fulfilled when we thus learn to trust our heavenly Father, and to set our affections on things above. Fourthly, there is the fine principle of moral sympathy, expressed in the 12th verse of this 7th chapter, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them : for this is the law and the prophets.' God's law is not fulfilled unless we are thus guided in all our dealings with our neighbours. Let these four principles be borne in mind, and you will have the essence of this sermon in compact form easily carried about with you, and, allowing for inevitable infirmities and shortcomings, easily applied in all practical emergencies. You and I are bound as men,—we are doubly bound as Christian men, who have been redeemed unto God by the blood of Jesus,—to illustrate that love, that sincerity, that faith, that moral sympathy, by which alone the law of God can be fulfilled. Those four texts, then, may be called the four lamps of a true Christian life, shedding a divine and glorious light on as many different spheres of duty, and surely guiding us on a path by which we may adorn the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In illustrating the last of these principles, viz., that 'whatsoever things ye would that men should do unto you, ye should do even so to them,' the Lord selects for His first example the practice of uncharitable judgment of our neighbours, which is unhappily so prevalent. And here let me say in the outset, before investigating the precise meaning of those words, that it is not without reason that this warning is introduced

just where it is. The Lord has been exhorting men to a spiritual, not a worldly life,—a life of faith in God, not of earthly care. Now, it consists with all our experience that, if there is any snare to which those who adopt that higher life are more liable than another, it is just this tendency to pronounce uncharitable judgment. How this should be the case I can hardly pretend to explain. Perhaps it is that being, by their own free choice, cut off from the more gross and carnal kind of sins, being debarred from indulgences in which others freely participate, their very superiority to the world in these respects engenders a kind of spiritual complacency, which, though forgetful enough of its own shortcomings, is always ready to see, and to point at the blemishes and imperfections of a neighbour. So it is, at any rate, that some who would not for worlds gratify the baser lusts of the flesh, and who could not profane their lips with foul or ribald words, and who really are turning their hearts away from the allurements of this world, and seeking to lay up treasures in heaven, will frequently be found practising the mean vice of the backbiter, ready to spy holes and spots in a neighbour's character, and prone to ascribe the worst meaning and the worst motives to everything he does. One might say this is specially the besetting sin of religious people. They are not greatly tempted to commit those evils which are more grossly and glaringly opposed to their profession of godliness. The more carnal appetites and passions are kept under restraint with comparative ease. But they have a keen eye for discovering other people's faults. They

have a great readiness to condemn other people's errors. They do not care to fling the cloak of charity over a neighbour's shortcomings; somehow or other their consciences are strangely blunted to those meaner vices of evil-speaking and bitterness, though they be indeed a root of mischief as deep-seated and dangerous as the worst vices of the world. It is very sad to have to say this. It is the dark side of the Christian shield, the worm at the root of its glorious beauty. And because the heart of man is always the same, always showing the same weaknesses, and liable to the same temptations, Jesus, who knew what was in it, follows up His exhortation to the life of faith and spiritual desire, by this warning, fit now as it was then, to the more religious class of people, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged. Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and considerest not the beam that is in thine own?' Ah! brethren, let us receive in all meekness this good word of the Lord. Let those of you who are seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness, watch specially against this snare, lest it entangle your souls. How base it is! how far from the true spirit of love! what reproach it brings on the gospel! how dishonouring to our Christian name! And if we continue to indulge it, what ruin it works both on him who does it, and on those who suffer by it,—eating as doth a canker into all that is good and lovely and of good report! I think, then, this word is specially addressed to those who are religious,—those who can forgive their enemies, those who are sincere in their devotion, those who are

laying up treasure in heaven ; and knowing their weak point, Jesus says to them, ‘ Judge not, that ye be not judged.’ But this word of Christ’s implies—

1. That we shall not be eager to spy out our neighbour’s faults.

2. That we shall not be in haste to speak of his faults.

3. That we shall not be willing to ascribe the worst motives to him. And

4. That in such matters we shall be regulated by the great law of sympathy, ‘ Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.’ Let me draw your attention to these points in detail. And,

1. ‘ Judge not, that ye be not judged ;’ that is to say, be not eager to spy out your neighbour’s faults, for that is not worthy, not Christian, not fulfilling the law of God. In illustrating this idea, our Lord uses a very beautiful and expressive figure. He says that people who do this are like a man who can see a mote—a little, the very least particle—in the eye of a neighbour, and who is lamentably blind to the beam—the far greater evil—that is in his own ; and He adds that if the man would cast the beam out of his own eye, he would see far more clearly to cast the mote out of his neighbour’s. This will require a little more detailed exposition. Let me therefore say that our Lord does not here absolutely forbid us to form any judgment whatever of our neighbour, and his conduct. That is quite impossible, and would not be for good even if it were possible. We cannot help having our opinion of other men, nor

can we, nor should we, altogether shut our eyes to their faults. Moral judgments of what is going on around us, and of those who transact it, we must needs form, so long as we have a conscience, a moral sense within us ; nor were it good for us, or for the world, if we failed to do so. We must form opinions on others, and to be true, they must be condemnatory of the wicked ; and what is more, we should deserve the just rebuke of the Lord, if we were so to confound the eternal distinctions of right or wrong as to withhold in all cases the word of honest reprobation from the evil-doer. Jesus therefore does not mean that we are never, in any circumstances, to judge our neighbour, or to condemn him for the thing he has done. What He forbids here, is the exceeding readiness we often betray to discover the shortcoming of others, and that more especially as it is frequently accompanied with a most wilful blindness to our own errors. For if we dealt more faithfully by ourselves, and were more resolutely determined to get rid of our own sins, we should see more clearly how to deal with our brother's, for we should have more brotherly sympathy with him ; and that would help us to understand his difficulties, and to appreciate his character aright, and to transact as a brother with a brother's frailties. Therefore, let us not be in haste to judge others, but rather let us judge our own selves. To understand aright the infirmities of our own character and the guilt of our own lives, will either make us chary of sitting in judgment on others, or will at least prepare us for forming righteous and just opinions by which we shall be

helpful to them in their temptations. Let us, then, avoid the cruel habit of sitting in judgment on others, searching out their flaws, picking holes in their characters, finding motes in their eye. It is a poor work at the best,—poor, mean, and ignoble; and meanwhile, as we watch the springing weeds in a neighbour's field, we forget how they are flowering and seeding in the garden of our own souls, which runs all to neglectful waste, barren and unfruitful of the true knowledge of Christ. Brethren, it is the very curse of this uncharitable spirit of judgment that evermore its eyes are abroad about the ends of the earth; anywhere rather than where they should be, searching out our own sins and shortcomings; and so it comes to pass that evils grow like great beams in our own eye, while we are searching out the small mote in our neighbour's. The more vigilant we are over him, the more careless we are of ourselves. The less we spare his faults, the more tender we grow of our own. The more vividly we see his smallest errors, the more blind we are to those which disfigure our own lives. And so, in very truth, the men who are most censorious, are just the very men who are themselves the least faultless, the most indulgent to their own cherished sins. A sad and unhappy, yet most natural result. They have no sympathy, not because they are faultless, but because they are faithless. They have no consideration, not because they are sternly righteous, but just because they make it their business to judge others, and not themselves. They see the mote in another's eye, but they cannot help him to cast it

out, because in reality they have never cast the beam from their own. And thus this readiness to judge is at once the cause of growing evil in themselves, and of their helpless inability to aid their brother. Their business has been not to cleanse out motes, but only to find them out. Their business has been not to see their own sins, but their neighbour's. And so they are alike neglectful of their own errors, and helpless as to those of others. Verily and in every light unprofitable servants! Surely, then, it becomes us to lay that good word to heart, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'

2. This implies that neither are we to speak hastily of the sins of our neighbours.

A readiness to spy out faults is one thing; it is another thing to be eager to speak of them, and point them out to others. I could imagine a person so constituted as to be always seeing the motes in his neighbour's eye, who yet managed to refrain from unkindly speech about them. Such an individual is at least possible, though in point of fact the two things are generally combined. And this is indeed the mischief of that kind of character, that it seldom if ever refrains from proclaiming the faults which it is so prone to discover, reckless of the pain or the injury which it may thus inflict. Were it otherwise, the evil resulting from such a habit would be mainly limited to the man himself who indulged in it. If any one, giving himself up to an envious and detracting spirit, got into the habit of seeing only or chiefly the faults, the errors, the shortcomings of his brethren, yet managed to restrain his

lips from uttering to others what he thus saw, or thought he saw, I should be sorry for that man ; I should know for certain that his own sins were being neglected, as he busied himself in discovering those of other men ; I should also feel assured that he would inevitably form so low an estimate of human nature that all faith in its higher powers and heroisms and noblenesses would die quite out of him, and with their death he himself would be incapable of anything great or generous or high ; I should be exceeding sorry for such a man, though I do not know that his conduct could do much harm, except to himself. That which makes this spirit of unkindly judging peculiarly mischievous, is that it is almost uniformly accompanied with a great readiness to proclaim its opinions ; not only to see faults, but to point them out also. Moreover, even that might do no great harm, but rather good, if it were done in the right quarter. If I tell his errors to my neighbour himself, it is possible I might have been better occupied in dealing with my own ; it is possible I may exhibit no very creditable or brotherly spirit in what I do ; but still, if the matter goes no further, I do no great harm, perhaps may even do him a service. The eager fault-finder indeed deserves small thanks for pointing out the mote in his brother's eye ; but were that all, neither should we care to blame him very much. That, however, is rarely the true state of the case. Such men are not often content with forming judgments which they keep to themselves, nor are they satisfied with communicating their opinion to the party specially concerned ; but having seen what

they think wrong, they are in haste to say it, anywhere, everywhere, judging and condemning their neighbour. No matter though the knowledge can profit no single soul. No matter though it may be fraught with most disastrous results to him whose good name is thus assailed. No matter though he has no opportunity given him to vindicate himself, and is going on in the most perfect unconsciousness that he is being robbed of his character. The backbiting, censorious spirit goes about its base work with growing heart and relish, reckless that 'life and death are in the power of the tongue.' And it is characteristic at once of him who is thus ready to judge, and also of those who listen to his words, that neither of them take any pains to ascertain the real truth of the matter. The fault-finder, looking ever through the prejudiced medium of his own unkindly thoughts, and piecing this and that together, draws his conclusion, and then is ready to assert for a fact what may be only the fancy of his own ungenerous mind; and those who listen to him, having commonly itching ears for all ignoble gossip, receive his words into a congenial soil which takes kindly to any unkindly judgment, asking no questions for conscience' sake; and so many an unjust and wicked sentence is formed and propagated, and infinite mischief done, without any opportunity to discover, and refute its malice. And what makes this sin peculiarly pernicious is, that even when the falsity is detected and exposed, the conscience both of the backbiter and of those who listen to him is strangely blinded, and rarely feels any proper shame,

but is fain to speak of its own wicked and pernicious conduct as only a mistake, an unfortunate mistake, for which in fact he is almost as much to be pitied as blamed. Ah! brethren, it is mournful to think how much of this evil spirit exists in the Church, how little is done to arrest its ravages, how few feel any conscience about it. Wherefore, putting away all malice, hatred, evil-speaking, and uncharitableness, see that ye judge not, that ye be not judged.

3. This implies also that we are to watch against that uncharitable spirit which is ever ready to ascribe the worst meanings, and the worst motives to our neighbour's conduct. This, in fact, leads directly to the root of the whole evil which we have been speaking of; and it is to me almost inexplicable how it can still retain the place it does among so many professedly religious people. For if there is any moral duty which, more than another, stands out as the very badge and symbol of Christianity, it is charity. Paul, who in the torrent of his earnest and vehement argument, seldom turns aside to indulge in bursts of passionate rhetoric, yet cannot help yielding to the sweet fascination of his theme when he comes to speak of the charity that covereth a multitude of sins, and hopeth all things and thinketh no evil; and as it rises up before his mind with all its tender and considerate grace, he gives way to one of the most glowing outbreaks of divine eloquence that ever thrilled the heart of man. Thus enshrined in the heart of the gospel, and exalted by the noblest utterances of inspiration, one might surely have

expected that, if there was one Christian grace which would be coveted, and cherished, and esteemed in the Church, it would have been this 'more excellent way,' this crowning glory and beauty of the Christian faith. But alas! instead of this, how often do we find a mean and envious spirit which, because it is itself incapable of acting from high and generous motives, cannot apparently give any one credit for higher principles than its own, and so with base detraction selects ever the worst possible motive for a brother's conduct, and ascribes ever the worst possible meaning to it. There may not be even a shadow of reason for such judgment. The whole spirit and character of those whom he is condemning may be utterly opposed to the view he takes. But instead of thinking no evil, he seems to think nothing but evil. Instead of covering a multitude of sins, he would conceal and blacken the most shining virtues. Incapable of understanding what is noble, or of sympathizing with it, he regards it ever with a sinister and detracting eye; and if it is at all possible to explain the conduct of another man by mean and unworthy reasons, he is sure to find them out, and ascribe it all to them. And yet such a man will call himself a Christian; will profess to repudiate, and keep aloof from the world; will talk of laying up treasures in heaven; will greatly relish what he calls religious fellowship, in which the fellowship mainly consists of an ample interchange of such uncharitable judgments. Alas! what strange anomalies we are! Is it any wonder that generous-minded worldlings are

not attracted by a piety of this stamp, so envious, so pitiless, so much given to think evil of every one, to find notes in every eye, and to make them where they are not; blind in the meanwhile to the beam in its own? Take heed, brethren, lest ye in this way dishonour the gospel, and turn men's hearts from Jesus. 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'

4. Let me remind you, in conclusion, that in all such matters we must be regulated by the great law of moral sympathy, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.'

At first sight, the words 'Judge not that ye be not judged,' might appear to be a mere appeal to our selfishness. There are various expressions of our Lord, which, on a superficial glance at them, seem to be of this character, so that one might conclude that He enjoined us to do what is right, not for its own sake, but for the reward which it brings. But whenever we look narrowly into the matter, this aspect of selfishness speedily vanishes, as it does, for example, in the case before us. You might conclude that Jesus counselled His followers to avoid uncharitable judgments, fault-findings, back-biting, and all the other forms of this sin, only because, if they indulged in such things, they would be tolerably certain themselves to meet with similar treatment. As a matter of fact, that is likely enough. If one were disposed to draw satirical pictures, one might easily show that the frequent groups of wicked gossips, whether worldly or religious, who assemble together for the purpose of tearing a neighbour's character to tatters,

are, each individual of them, just as bitterly uncharitable to every other member of the group ; that they do not spare each other more than those whom they agree to defame ; and what is more, they know it too, and do not trust each other. That is a very miserable and melancholy account to give of them ; but it is true, and it only shows that if our Lord meant to forbid uncharitable judgments merely because we might ourselves become in turn the victims of them, He really gave us no effectual motive for refraining from them, and betrayed a strange ignorance of the human heart ; for people do such things, and go on doing them, though all the while they know perfectly well that they are themselves the victims of the same malicious device. But in point of fact, that is not the Lord's meaning. To get at that, you must place these words, 'Judge not that ye be not judged,' in the light of that great principle, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.' Then its meaning becomes plain. It is simply this : 'Judge not your neighbour in a way in which you would not like him to judge you.' Do not spy out his faults in a fashion which you would consider unkind and ungenerous, if done to yourself ; do not talk of his errors as you would feel it unfair to have your own discussed and babbled about ; do not ascribe base motives and wicked meanings to him, which you would hold to be unjust if ascribed to you. You would like your own conduct to be scanned with a kindly eye, to be spoken of with tender consideration, to be explained

as by one who hopeth all things and thinketh no evil. Well, so do ye to others 'whatsoever ye would that they should do to you.' Let that be your guide in all such matters. It is not a rule of selfishness, but of sympathy. It is to put yourself in the room of those whom your conduct may injure, and to deal with them as tenderly as ye would like to be dealt with yourself. And if ye do this for Christ's sake, because He hath enjoined it, and because He also so faithfully practised it, and because love only is the fulfilling of the law, then shall ye walk worthy of your high calling, and 'the calves of your lips' shall be a sweet sacrifice unto God. So may He grant you grace to illustrate that holy and sympathizing charity which is the bond of perfection; and to His name be praise.

XVIII.

THE LAW KEPT BY SYMPATHY.

'Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.'—MATT. VII. 6, 12.

THESE expressions were, most likely, common proverbs, familiar to the people of Israel; or if not so previously, they would at once obtain currency among those brief and pithy sayings which concentrate the wisdom and experience of a nation. With regard to the first of them, 'Give not that which is holy unto dogs,' it must be remembered that in the East the dog is not, as with us, esteemed for his sagacity and faithfulness as man's chosen friend among all the brute creation. On the contrary, he is despised and neglected, held to be one of the unclean animals, and abhorred nearly as much as the swine; and in consequence he remains very much in his natural wild state, roving the streets with the jackal, and preying on the garbage, and snarling at the passer-by, with no man to be his master, still less his friend. Now, if any animal were offered

in sacrifice to God, it became by that consecration a holy thing; for though only certain appointed parts of it might be used for the direct service of the altar, it was all hallowed, because it had been devoted to the Lord. Therefore, the offerer of the sacrifice would have been revolted by the idea that any portion of the sacred victim had been flung to the unclean dogs: it might be used by the priests; or it might be burnt in the fire; but to give it to the dogs, would have seemed a desecration of that which was holy. Some people might call these feelings over-refined. They might say that if the appointed sacrifice was offered to the Lord, it did not matter what became of the rest; and surely it was better to feed the hungry animals with it than to waste and burn it. But here, as in many other respects, we find God's law recognising the legitimacy of those delicate sensibilities which coarse natures are prone to despise as unreasonable. So, for example, it was written, 'Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk;' for such an act, besides being probably a heathenish sacrifice with a special symbolic meaning, revolts those tender feelings as with a kind of wanton outrage. So also here the Lord says, 'Give not that which is holy unto dogs,' for the more tender sensibilities of the devout worshipper would be pained by the thought that his offering had been divided, as it were, between God and an unclean beast. The other proverb requires no explanation. It is as much as to say, Give acorns to the swine, which they can value, not pearls, which may only irritate, and enrage them; for that which is precious

to you may be worthless to them, and in their ignorance they may trample it under foot, and dishonour it.

The general truth embodied in these proverbs, then, is that Christians must learn wisdom as well as charity, and that, while it is their duty to bear witness for God, there is also a measure of reserve and thoughtful reticence, which is equally incumbent, for their own sakes, and for the sake of the truth, and also for the sake of those who might otherwise be led to outrage and dishonour the truth. But while that is the general idea, there seems to me to be a shade of difference between the two sayings which is worth a passing notice. Things holy are not to be thrown to dogs; things precious are not to be cast to swine; and I cannot help thinking these two words indicate two classes of subjects which are to be dealt with in the same spirit of wise reserve. Further, it is necessary to find some guiding principle by which to regulate this law of reticence, which has been often falsely and perniciously applied; and that regulating principle seems to be given in the words, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.' Therefore my remarks now will divide themselves under these three divisions, namely—

1. The reserve which will not give things holy to dogs;

2. The reserve which will not cast pearls to swine; and

3. The principle which is mainly to regulate such reserve.

1. There is a wise Christian reserve which will not give that which is holy to dogs. The dog, as I have said, was reckoned, with the swine, among the unclean animals. They were both of them types of the grossly sensual kind of sinners, given over to mere brute appetite, and insensible to any higher life. Hence it was a common saying, 'without, are dogs,' to indicate the general carnality of the Gentile world. So Christians are bidden 'beware of dogs,'—to be on their guard against the coarse, fleshly world that revelled in its gross animalism, and turned ever loathsomely, 'like the dog to his vomit.' In general, then, those who are alluded to here under the figure of dogs, are the gross, sensual type of men, who have no respect for spiritual things, but rebel, and contradict, and as it were snarl at them, dragging them in the mire of their own filthy ways, and rending them asunder. To such then we are not to give things that are holy,—not, at least, until they are, in some measure, prepared to deal with them. For things holy belong to the holy, or at any rate to those who recognise them to be holy, and will treat them, therefore, with the reverence which is their due. We are bound to act so that these sacred things shall not be despised, and that our good shall not be evil spoken of, and that we shall not needlessly arouse the opposition and hatred to spiritual concerns, which these carnal minds are so ready to indulge in. Now, in regard to the things holy about which we are to exercise this cautious reserve, let me say it is not possible precisely to mark the limits and boundaries of this field,

but that it must be left, in a great measure, to the spiritual discernment and sensibility of each believer. A single illustration, however, will perhaps indicate, with sufficient distinctness, the kind of province occupied by things holy. In domestic intercourse there are many matters with which a stranger may not intermeddle, more especially one who has no sympathy with its sweet interchange of fellowship and love. To lay bare all its privacies to the general world would be to desecrate some of the purest joys of life, and to subject them to the unfeeling ridicule, or coarse abuse of those who comprehend them not. No refined or right-hearted man could be guilty of such conduct wantonly; and even when some imperious necessity appears to overbear these sensibilities, and to demand that the veil of inner privacy should be lifted from his home, he shrinks from it with an instinctive shuddering, and only can do it partially, and with an utter repugnance. Now, in like manner, there is an intimate spiritual life,—a close and fond and frank-hearted religious experience which is, as it were, the home-life of the family of God; a thing infinitely delightful to the soul; and in the interchange of whose loving joys and sweet sorrows and wondrous hopes lies not a little of the blessed fellowship of the saints. Of all holy things, then, that beautiful and sacred experience is the one which will least bear coarse and rude handling; and there is nothing more painful to the man of God than to see it treated with the snarling of the unbeliever, or the ridicule of the worldly, or the hatred of the carnal-minded. Some will call this feel-

ing a matter of mere sentiment. It is the custom with certain people to sneer at all delicate and high-minded refinement of feeling as pure sentimentality. They are ready to say that, if the religious experience be true, it suffers nothing by the snarling of the dogs, who only bring down condemnation on themselves by their scorn of that which they cannot rightly appreciate. Be it so. Yet as we shall see by and by, it is not our duty needlessly to bring such condemnation upon them. It is not our duty to provoke them to do evil. It is not our duty to put stumbling-blocks in their way that they may fall. And even if it were otherwise, I say that God recognises the claims and the legitimacy of those sacred feelings which revolt from the idea of giving things holy to dogs. It is not right, it is not Christian, to subject those hallowed experiences to the mockery of the coarse-minded. The unused portions of the sacrifice were not to be cast to unclean beasts. The delicate bloom of pious or natural sensibility was not to be outraged when it could be helped; for God put His seal on those feelings, the effect of which is to refine and to elevate the soul; and he who would allow a hard and meagre rationalism to brush away these finer spiritual sensibilities little knows the exquisite, yet healthy, tenderness of God's holy law. We are bound therefore, for the sake of that spiritual refinement, which is one of the best safeguards against sensuality, and one of the surest helps to a high Divine fellowship, to be careful that those sacred experiences of the soul shall not be needlessly subjected to the mockery of profane

persons. Hence also it is probable that the Lord's Supper was originally a mystery, or secret service, from which those without the pale,—the dogs,—were excluded; because its simple and pathetic memorial of Christ's death, and the kiss of love with which it concluded, would be likely only to awaken the ridicule, or still worse feelings, of those who were not of the household of God, and who therefore could not enter into its deep and pure spirit. Thus the inner life of the soul, and along with it the peculiar symbol by which the Lamb's bride expressed her loving devotion to Him, and probably other things of a similar type, would be reckoned specially things holy, which were not to be given to dogs. They belonged, as it were, to the secret family intercourse of the Lord's redeemed ones, and were not to be desecrated by the gaze and the comments of the profane. And though it is no longer necessary to apply this rule to the Lord's Supper, yet there is still room for Christian wisdom to exercise a cautious reserve about such matters, and to remember the word of the Lord, 'Give not that which is holy to dogs.'

2. There is also a similar reserve with regard to things precious: 'Neither cast your pearls before swine.' The things precious, indicated by pearls, may be also, no doubt, very sacred; but they do not belong to what I have called the holy privacies of religious life. On the contrary, they are meant for use and free circulation,—for by the pearls I understand chiefly the truths of the gospel. The kingdom of heaven is likened to a pearl of

great price, because of the beauty, the purity, the unspeakable value of the truth. But this pearl, though it becomes ours by faith in Christ Jesus, is not ours to be hoarded and hidden, or kept only for personal ornament and pleasure. No man is entitled to retain the glorious truths of the gospel to himself for his own delectation only; for they are given to him not more for his own salvation than for general good and blessing to the world. They are in this respect like gold, which, when it is hoarded up and treasured, is of comparatively little profit to the owner of it; and the world suffers loss by the withdrawal of so much wealth from circulation, which if it were rightly employed would benefit others by increasing the general resources. Just so the truths of the gospel, if they are cherished as a mere private treasure, fail to bring all the fulness of their blessing to him who loves them, and lives on them; for it is only when they are communicated and circulated that we obtain the whole fruit of their gracious increase, and know the full preciousness of the pearl we have obtained. There is this difference then between them and the things holy previously alluded to. The holy things are strictly private, or belong only to the household of faith; the pearls are really intended to be given to others, only they must not be cast before swine.

I apprehend, therefore, that this second proverb implies that even in the performance of the great Christian duty of preaching the gospel, there is still left room for some discretion and reserve, lest by unwise speech we bring dishonour on the truth and needless persecution

on ourselves. It is indeed our duty to proclaim the whole counsel of God, keeping nothing back. It is not our province to conceal anything which He has been pleased to reveal. We must not take upon ourselves to determine what it was proper for Him to express, and what it would have been better to have been silent about. That would be certainly an impertinent presumption. Yet, on the other hand, there is a time for everything; and 'a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.' 'Reprove not a scorner lest he hate thee,' Solomon says, 'and he that reproveth a scorner getteth himself shame.' If a man is blind and mad with intoxicating drink, it surely were not wise to urge on him, at such a moment, the awful truths or gracious promises of the gospel, for it is only too likely that he would trample your pearls under foot. Nor is it only in such cases that it is proper to exhibit this reticence. Your child, whose mind is yet unformed, and incapable of comprehending the deeper mysteries of grace, it would be unkind to instruct in some matters even of deepest moment, for that would be to lay on it a burden which God has not fitted it to bear. And besides children, there are grown people in the very same predicament, as our Lord himself allowed when He told the disciples, 'I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now.' There are some truths, unspeakably precious to those who are able to receive them, for which the common mind requires a measure of preparation and training, for if they are forced on it without such preparation, they may be put to great disadvantage,

and arouse a most unnecessary opposition and hatred. Light must break on a man gradually. If you drag him at once out of familiar darkness into the broad blaze of noon, you may chance to blind him utterly, and you will certainly awaken a painful shrinking from the glare which he is not able to endure. Hence God trained His ancient Israel by long centuries of a dim and imperfect dispensation, before sending the True Light; and even after all, alas! how few were able to receive His report. Thus, brethren, at certain stages of life it is proper to exercise reserve, lest the young and giddy mind should bring sorrow to itself by a light and frivolous treatment of awful mysteries which, in God's providence, it was not prepared to deal with. And a like reserve must be shown to men who may have put themselves by passion, or inebriety, or otherwise, into such a state that they are incapable either of reasoning clearly, or feeling rightly. And still further, a similar reserve must be shown towards those who are gross and earthly, at least until we have done what we can to lift them above the state of the dog or the swine, and to prepare them for handling with reverence the deep things of God. And the reason given for such reticence is that, if we do otherwise, we may at once bring dishonour on the truth, and also danger on ourselves. And these two things must combine ere we shall be justified in keeping silence. It will not do to hold back any truth of God merely because, if we proclaim it, the carnal world may turn again, and rend us. It is only when the truth also may suffer wrong, that we are

entitled to pause, and consider how much men are able to receive. Nay, even when both of these results are to be apprehended, it may still be our duty to speak out, as our Lord himself also did when He proclaimed himself King, although He well knew that His royal character would be subjected to mockery, and His royal person to shame and death. The wise and cautious reserve, then, which He counsels here is not of that kind which would destroy all the fearless heroism of the Christian character, by allowing a man to be silent in those cases when to speak might possibly bring dishonour on the truth, and peril to himself. Rather it is limited, and refers chiefly to the time and manner in which the truth is to be spoken. We are not to *cast about* our pearls in such a way as to lead the swine to trample on them. And we are not to do this needlessly at such a time as will be likely to provoke wrath and hatred and persecution. As far as we honourably may, and with a good conscience, it is our duty to avoid bringing any reproach on the gospel, and also to avoid rousing the opposition of the fleshly world. Therefore there is room left for Christian discretion and thoughtful wisdom, but not for unchristian timidity or faithlessness, in this word of the Lord's. But

3. For our practical guidance in such matters it seems to me we must always read these words in the light of the great principle, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.' Christian men are often led to utter truths which they find that people are nowise prepared to receive. Christ himself

did so ; for when He told the multitude that they must eat his flesh, and drink his blood, they were offended at him, and fell away from him. Christian men have also often to utter truths which arouse hatred, and bring bitter persecutions on their heads ; and if they did not, if they held their peace lest the swine should turn again and rend them, all the glory of Christian heroism would die out of the Church of God. Christian men have even to utter truths which, alas ! they find men ready to trample in the mire, and cover with shame and dishonour. The history of the Church of Jesus affords ample illustrations of all these, and even instances in which the holiest things have been inevitably subjected to scorn and reproach. But we must not therefore conclude that those who may have been the occasion of such evils, were in all cases guilty, and failed in the wisdom which the Lord requires of us. For if we act upon a right principle, we are not responsible for the results of our conduct, however painful they be. We cannot always foresee the storm that our words may raise ; and even though we could, we may still be bound to go on, provided always we are animated by a right motive, and guided by a just rule of conduct. It is therefore of the highest moment to ascertain what is the law, if any law there be, which regulates when to speak and when to be silent, what to say and what not to say.

And here let me say that at various times in the history of the Church, men have arisen who, on the ground of our text, and of the several other passages to

which I have referred, have held that Christianity sanctions a custom which prevailed among the ancient philosophers, and according to which there existed what was called an esoteric, and also an exoteric, doctrine. Forgive me for using these words, which are only familiar to the learned ; but the thing that they mean is not confined to the learned. And this is what they mean :—The old Greek philosophers held that truth absolutely, as they saw it, should be taught only in the schools, only to the limited few who by mental aptitude and culture were fitted to understand, and receive it. These and these only might range over the whole broad field of philosophical inquiry and speculation ; but as to the people in general, it was thought that they were not able to discuss, and duly weigh such matters, and therefore they were to be left to indulge in their ignorant superstitions, or at best, only so much was to be communicated to them as their wise teachers thought proper to give. Moreover, these same teachers deemed themselves, at the same time, quite entitled publicly to conform to the customs and opinions of the people whom they despised ; and thus there grew up a system of daring and licentious thought in private, under a hypocritical conformity to the usages and ideas of the ignorant who meanwhile were left either in total darkness, or at any rate with a very partial knowledge of the secret wisdom of the schools. These two sets of ideas, then,—those which belonged to the special school of philosophy, and those which prevailed and were allowed to prevail among the people, were called severally the

esoteric and exoteric doctrine of wisdom ; and as a natural result, the favoured few prided themselves on their superior knowledge, and despised those who were left without in their ignorance. Now, in like manner, the doctrine of Christian reserve has been sometimes held to authorize a similar haughty reticence on the part of the educated and cultivated religious people, while the masses of the poor were to be left to their traditions and customary notions and old usages, as if they were quite unfit for anything better, and would only suffer harm by an attempt to disclose to them the deeper mysteries of faith. Let me say then, in regard to this idea, that our Lord sanctions no such view ; it finds no support either in the words, or in the life of Jesus. For while it is true that He unfolded His doctrine more fully to the little company of His chosen apostles whom He was training to do His work, than He did to the general multitude who crowded to hear Him, yet His special teachings to the apostles were meant to be by them communicated in due season to all the world. It was not His principle to give His immediate disciples an exclusive wisdom, and to constitute a kind of religious freemasonry, from whose secret mysteries the general world was excluded. All He aimed at, was only to train a certain body to be the medium of teaching all men the truth which was to be the richest inheritance and blessing of the world. Put out of your mind then the whole idea of one doctrine for the learned, and another for the ignorant,—a Christian system fitted for the wise and prudent, and another Christian system for

the common people. The reserve which He enjoins has no affinity whatever with such a practice. Christianity even in its deepest mysteries is meant for all, and is fit for all the world.

And the great guiding principle which can alone direct us as to the time and manner in which any of its truths is either to be spoken, or to be kept in reserve, is this, 'Whatsoever things ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them.' That is to say, it is our duty in certain cases to consider how we ourselves would like it, if the truth were forced on our attention at such a time, or in such a way, as to provoke our opposition to it, and lead us into sinful rejection of its claims. Take, for example, a man who is intoxicated, and who is in consequence incapable either of looking rightly at spiritual things, or of dealing rightly with them. If now at such a time you press them on his notice, you lead him into the additional sin of trampling the pearls under foot. Therefore the Christian principle is this: Put yourself in imagination into his position. Would you like, in such circumstances, that any one should lead you to commit sin? Ought you not to do to him as, in the same circumstances, you would like him to do to you? Ought you not to avoid provoking him to do evil, and for that purpose to withhold, as far as you may, the temptation to do so? You would not like to have sacred things thrust upon you in such a way as that you might be led to treat them after a fashion which in your calmer moments you would bitterly regret. You might allow that

nothing could justify you in so dealing with them; that you had done wrong and sinned against the Lord; but still you would feel that with a little more wisdom, and kindly consideration on the part of others, you might have been saved from committing this evil. Now, as you would that others should do unto you, do ye even so to them. Do not give things holy to dogs, nor yet cast your pearls before swine, for you may provoke them to evil from which it is your business to save them, and which might be avoided by a little careful preparation, or by selecting a more suitable time. Let the spirit of Christian love and sympathy guide you therefore when to speak and when to be silent, and thus you shall best save the truth from dishonour, and your brethren from sin.

XIX.

CONCLUSION—THE STRAIT GATE.

‘Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction; and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.’—MATT. VII. 13, 14.

WE have now finished what may be properly called the body of the sermon, and to-day we enter on the peroration, or concluding practical and hortatory remarks. The whole discourse indeed is intensely practical. It contains no metaphysical subtleties, no abstract speculations, no curious and over nice distinctions, in elaborating which the mind might be turned aside from the clear path of duty; but from beginning to end it is made to bear most directly on the actual business of moral and spiritual life. Still there is also, as I have tried to show you, a distinct expository purpose in all the former part of the sermon. It is interpretive of the great principle, ‘I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.’ That is the theme of the discourse, and that theme Jesus illustrates with most clear and effective elucidation of its meaning, never indeed launching

forth into vague theories on the subject, but always keeping close to practical fact and reality. This exposition, however, appears to conclude with the 12th verse of this chapter ; and the remainder of the discourse is occupied with a few exhortations and warnings naturally arising from what has been already said. It is just as if the Lord had paused, after summing up all our duty in those weighty and precious words, ‘Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them ;’ and then, ere he ceased altogether to speak, had added something to this effect: ‘I have now set before you the great laws of the kingdom of God. Will ye enter into that kingdom by the strait gate which leadeth unto life ? or will ye go with the multitude along the broad road that leadeth to destruction ? Other teachers, other prophets, may speak to you in a different strain—may tell you that there is no need to pass through a strait gate, and they may look very innocent and comfortable guides. But be who they may, they are wolves in sheep’s clothing, and so you shall find them when you try them by their fruits. Take heed of such men, therefore, and listen not to their charming, charm they never so sweetly. Moreover, it is not enough that ye hear me, and refuse to hear them. The kingdom of heaven demands action, as well as attention. To call me Lord, Lord, will not profit unless ye also do the will of my Father ; for except ye both hear my sayings and do them, your house is built upon the sand, and in the day of trial it shall fall, and great shall be the fall of

it.' That seems to me the drift of this last part of the sermon; and now let us look more particularly at the words, 'Enter ye in at the strait gate.'

What is the strait gate which we are exhorted to enter? And why is it called strait? And, in short, what does this exhortation mean?

In another place our Lord says, 'I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved;' and that great truth, no doubt, lies at the root of these words, 'Enter ye in at the strait gate.' The succeeding warning, 'Beware of false prophets,' appears to indicate clearly enough that they shall be entering the strait gate if they give heed to the true teacher,—if they hear Him, the Lord from heaven. The expression, 'I am the door,' forms therefore a connecting link between the exhortation of verse 13 and the warning of verse 15, and shows the line of thought which might otherwise seem rather obscure. It is as much as to say, 'Enter in at the strait gate; believe me, and obey me, for I am the door that leadeth unto life; but beware of false prophets, for whatever their appearances, and whatever their profession, they will take you to the broad road which leadeth to destruction.' And thus, although it is not so formally expressed as in other parts of the word, yet the great fundamental idea of the gospel, that Christ personally is 'the way, the truth, and the life,' and that faith in Him is the one essential requisite for our salvation, has a place in this sermon just as really, though not so obviously, as in other parts of Scripture. The call to enter in at the strait gate, connected

as it is with the warning to beware of false prophets, appears manifestly to involve that belief in the True Prophet is the one door of entrance into the narrow way that leadeth unto life. And I ask you to observe this, both that you may be led ever to keep in mind the great fundamental truth of the gospel, and not to go seeking for other doors and knocking at them ; and also because it is well to note how, from the very beginning of His ministry, we find, on careful study, the germs and roots of all His doctrine which He afterwards more fully revealed. For there is a perfect harmony pervading all the teachings of Jesus, and if we fail to see that harmony, it is only because we are ready to dwell on the superficial contrasts which they also present, and do not take pains to search out the profound unity which really characterizes them all. People speak of the Christ who has been depicted by the tender loving insight of John, as something altogether different from the Christ who preached the Sermon on the Mount. And of course, to the superficial glance, there is a very remarkable difference between the clear moral teacher who speaks here, and the strange, apparently egotistical prophet whose spiritual enigmas John delights to set forth. Yet, when we look narrowly into the matter, we find that one of these perplexing words of John's Gospel is in reality the only key to part of this sermon, which must appear unconnected and confused, unless we remember that Jesus is the door—the strait gate—and that false prophets lead unto the way of death.

But accepting this as the real expository key to this whole passage, there remains a considerable difficulty to be explained, which, at first sight, this appears rather to increase than to diminish. Why should this gate be called strait? Is it that God's mercy is straitened? Is Christ unwilling to let us in? Is there anything in the gospel which would justify us in regarding it as narrow and intended only for a few? Assuredly not. We may at once set aside all and any explanations of this saying, which go on the assumption that God's mercy is in any sense straitened. Whosoever will, may take of the water of life freely. There is a most absolute and unrestricted offer of salvation; and we are bound to believe that that offer is honestly made, and can be really accepted by every man to whom it is made. In order to understand the language of our Lord, then, let me recall to your recollection the four great laws of the kingdom; and when you have laid them to heart, it will not be difficult to understand why this gate should be called strait.

You will remember, then, that in illustrating the doctrine that He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it, Jesus laid down four great guiding principles, by means of which only that law could be fulfilled. He did not go into details and particulars, and entangle himself in the endless casuistry of smaller moralists. But he kindled four lamps of duty, by attending to which the whole path of life should become clear to all men—and these were love, sincerity, faith, and moral sympathy; and if you will give heed to

these, it will be easy to see why the gate is called strait. For

1st, He enjoins us 'to love our enemies.' He does not merely forbid us to revenge our injuries by demanding 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' Nor does He only enjoin us to do good to them that hate us, for there might be a subtle refinement of vengeance that could assent to that, and when an enemy hungered would give him food, and yet might retain all its hatred, and even use the apparent kindness as a means to gratify itself. But what the Lord requires is, that we should actually love them. Now, if you consider what that means, you cannot but feel that such a gate is a very strait one, and hard indeed to enter in at. 'What, must I give up my natural resentment for injury I have received? Do I not well to be angry? Nay, must I not only forgive mine enemy, and even do him a good turn, or perhaps pray for him; but is it necessary actually to love him? Love the man who has wronged me, who has robbed my good name, and ruined my fortune, and blighted my whole life! That is a hard thing, who can bear it?' Certainly, brethren, few can bear it; and yet it is essential, if we would enter in at the strait gate. The spirit of wrath and hate and revenge hath no place in Christ who loved those that most wronged Him; and without a similar spirit we cannot enter in by 'the door' and be saved.

2d, Moreover, the Lord also laid down a principle of unostentatious sincerity, which forms a very strait gate to all manner of hypocrites and formalists. Let not

thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth,' is for many men an extremely stringent law. 'What,' they might say, 'must we do our alms, and nobody hear of it? and fast, and afflict ourselves, and get no credit for it? and pray in our closets so that people may even think we neglect our devotions? Is our religious life, our spiritual business, to be so conducted that, while we are strenuously practising every good work, we may be, at the same time, actually set down by all the world as examples of the very reverse? Are our prayers only to be heard in heaven, and our charities only to be seen in the good they do, and our fastings hidden behind a smiling face, and under the oil of gladness?' And although in their inner hearts people cannot but allow that that is a high and noble ideal of religion, yet they also rebel against the thought that they are to get no credit among men for their piety. It seems hard; it is a strait gate; nay, they even persuade themselves that it must be wrong, since it would deprive the world of the benefit of the good example they are showing; and so the deceitful heart is mightily reluctant to enter in at that door. It seems a tremendous piece of self-denial to do all things as unto God, and not unto men.

But 3d, Even all this—this difficult love of one's enemies, and this utter sincerity and repudiation of self-interest—even this fails to express all the straitness of the gate. For Jesus goes on yet further to say, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things shall be added therewith.' And no sooner is this principle stated than immediately

a host of seemingly most reasonable and quite insuperable difficulties arise. How can a man cast off all worldly care, and be as easy as the birds and the lilies? It is not possible to take no thought for to-morrow; and what is more, if it were possible, it would be wrong; for prudence, and a just consideration of all the manifold uncertainties of life, require us to make some provision for old age, and for the future of those who are depending on our labour. All which is true enough, no doubt; only it is not to the purpose. For what our Lord is contending against is the absorbing care which practically usurps the place that is due to God, and leads us to seek with our whole heart the corruptible treasures, and to neglect those which moth and rust do not corrupt. And the carnal, worldly mind finds it a very hard thing,—a very strait gate indeed,—to set its affections on things above, and trust God for all else that may be needed. This childlike faith in the Father's care, which is the essential matter involved here, is strongly repugnant to our natural character. The evil heart of unbelief frets at it mightily, and will hardly be persuaded to try it at all. And yet we cannot enter in at the strait gate unless we take no thought for the morrow; but seek first the kingdom of God, and trust Him to provide the rest.

4th, And now add to all these difficult requirements the further demand made on us, 'that we should do to others as we would that they should do to us.' Observe, it is not said merely that we are to refrain from doing to them what we would not like them to do to

us. The Jews had a negative rule to that effect, which was so far good ; but such a negation does not by any means come up to the full meaning of our Lord's word. People are very apt to be satisfied with themselves if they have harmed no one ; if they have kept their hands from working mischief, and their tongues from speaking guile, even though they never have done one really kind, one good, one merciful or loving deed all their lives. But that will by no means satisfy the Lord's requirement here. Our neighbour must be to us even as ourselves. We must look to his interest as we would to our own. We must plead excuses for him as readily, and show kindness to him as actively, and have consideration for him as tenderly, as we would like to be done to ourselves ; and therefore it will not do merely to refrain from injuring him. It is necessary so to sympathize with him, so to enter into his case, with its difficulties and troubles and necessities, as if it were our own, and to regulate our conduct as in similar circumstances we would desire him to act toward us. Now here again is an extremely strait gate. It implies that we should never judge hastily, but take pains, and be at some trouble to understand his case, and to feel what he may be expected to feel, and to follow up our sympathy with active help and kindness. And it is hard for the selfishness of our hearts to take the same interest in another, as we do in our own affairs. Yet we cannot really enter in at the strait gate, unless we are prepared to bear each other's burdens in this spirit, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Taking now these four great principles of duty along with us, it is not difficult to understand how this door, which is in one view so free and so large, being open to every sinner, and rejoicing to welcome him within its gate, should at the same time be called strait. For, in order to enter it, we must deny ourselves, and crucify some of the most cherished instincts of our sinful nature. True it is, that He, who is himself the door by which we enter into the kingdom, will help us to accomplish this great work which never will be done without such help. It is not to be supposed that, previous to our coming to Christ, we shall have perfectly achieved this great task for ourselves. That is not the aim of my remarks at all, and indeed you will have at once mistaken my meaning, and also misunderstood the Lord's doctrine, which is of far greater consequence, if you think for a moment that the great duties I have been setting before you are to be regarded as preliminary conditions, by the performance of which you shall be entitled to enter in at the strait gate, and to have an interest in Christ, and a place in the kingdom of God. What I mean is, not that these things must be done in order to win Christ, but that by accepting of Him you agree to these principles, and consent that they shall be the law of your life, God helping you by his Spirit faithfully to observe them. To enter in at the strait gate implies that those great laws of love and sincerity and faith and sympathy, which were the regulating principles of Christ's life, shall be in like manner the animating spirit of our conduct, and its controlling

power ; and when you calmly consider them, you cannot but see that they are, severally and altogether, of such a kind as to demand an immense amount of self-denial on our part. People often look at the gospel in only one of its aspects, as a revelation of God's love to his sinful creatures, and the discovery of a scheme of salvation admirably adapted to secure the highest ends of justice, while it also brings forgiveness to the guilty. And regarding it in that light, they seem to think that their chief, or indeed only business with it, is just to get some clear understanding of its various wise and careful provisions for adjusting the claims of His righteousness and our need of mercy ; which being clearly understood, and honestly believed, they seem to think that now all is well, and that they are in a fair way to reap all the blessings of the everlasting covenant. I do not wonder that men who take that view find it difficult to understand what is meant by the strait gate ; for in fact such a Christianity is quite an easy matter, consisting of mere opinions about God, and God's way of dealing with men. But now place alongside of that the great truths I have been trying so long to expound and enforce from this sermon of Christ's. Remember that the gospel is not merely a revelation of what the Lord has done for us, but also a revelation of what He would have us to be, and is anxious to make us. Bring together its divine doctrine and its human duty ; and let it be clearly understood that, in addition to our intelligent belief in the scheme of salvation, we must, in order to be the children of God's

kingdom, yield a heartfelt consent to the four great laws of that kingdom which Christ here lays down. We must put away wrath, anger, malice, and love our very enemies, even as Christ loved us while we were still enmity against Him ; we must have done with hypocrisy, formalism, and ostentatious display to be seen of men, and to get praise of them, and do all things as unto God in an utter simplicity and sincerity of heart ; we must crush the uprising of worldly cares and cravings, and learn to trust in the heavenly Father's care, seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and relying on God's faithfulness to provide all else that may be needed ; and finally, we must learn to enter with loving sympathy into our brother's trials and difficulties, and to judge him tenderly, and deal with him kindly, doing to him as we would like him to do to us. Now, to do all that, is no easy task. It is hard, it is mortifying, to consent to such a life ; it is a very strait gate for sinful man to enter in at ; yet it is the only one that leadeth unto life. He only can be a child of the kingdom, who is willing to accept of Christ in this spirit, taking up the cross to follow Him ; and the man who has not done so verily has not entered in at the strait gate ; but rather like a thief or a robber seeks to take the kingdom of heaven by force. You can understand now how it is that Jesus adds, 'few there be that find' the narrow road ; for alas ! there are few who will consent to go along it. Not that it is difficult to find ; not that it is obscure and hard to be distinguished from other roads. It is easy enough to discover ; but

it is not easy for human nature to deny itself, and consent to this loving, sincere, faithful, and sympathizing life. Ah ! bethink you, brethren, whether ye have really entered this strait gate. You have called yourselves Christians. Remember that, without the spirit of the Son, there can be no fellowship with the Father ; and this is that spirit of life, which now we have clearly set before you.

For alas ! brethren, the wide gate and the broad road are that which alone many find in our day, as well as in that of Jesus. After having so largely explained the nature of the strait gate, it will not be necessary to dwell at much length on the other. It is broad and easy, just because it demands no self-denial, no sacrifice, no bearing of a cross ; it may, or it may not, be also vicious ; it may be even highly respectable. Nay, it may call itself Christian, and entertain clear and sound views of many of the great truths of the gospel, and rejoice to hear them faithfully proclaimed. But it is the broad road for all that, and it leadeth to destruction. It does not require a man to love his enemies, but leaves him free to cherish resentment and hatred ; it encourages, instead of rebuking, the formalism and Pharisaism which does its alms and prayers and fastings so as to get credit of men ; it is busy with the treasures which moth and rust do corrupt, and with the cares of this life ; and it finds no fault with our little faith in God's fatherly care : and it forbids no one to pronounce harsh judgments, or to do many things to his neighbour which he would by no means like to be

done to himself. In short, the broad road is one of self-seeking, self-righteousness, self-reliance, and self-love ; pleasant, flowery, easy ; never without plenty of good company, all neighbourly enough so long as you do well for yourself ; only leading at length to destruction. Do not misunderstand the nature of it ; do not suppose that the broad road is only that which heinous sinners are journeying along,—the road occupied by thieves, drunkards, unclean, profane, and such like. There are many highly respectable people going along it, who pray much, and give alms largely, and fast in sackcloth and ashes, and are greatly esteemed for their piety. The essential characteristic of this road is not its viciousness, but only its selfishness ; not its irreligiousness, but only that its religion is not love of God, but always love of self. It may talk about the cross, but it never carries it ; it may glory in Christ's sacrifice, but it never sacrifices self ; it rejoices in being forgiven, but has no heart to forgive ; and such religion, with its readiness to judge uncharitable judgments, its intense worldly-mindedness and respect for mere wealth, its hard and pitiless severity, its readiness to make loud and clamorous display of its abundant good works, often even usurps to itself the exclusive name of evangelical, the special title to be the very gospel faith, in the face of its glaring outrage of one and all the fundamental laws of God's kingdom. This is one of the most painful aspects of professedly religious life, to my mind,—that men can, to a large extent, separate religious doctrine from moral duty, and while keenly

sensitive about the former, can go on outraging the great moralities of the gospel, and all the while proclaiming, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we.' There is need, therefore, of a close searching of our hearts, lest it should turn out that we may be on the broad road without knowing it; and the way to carry on that search effectually is not to apply this or the other doctrinal test, and ascertain how far it commends itself to the approval of your understanding, but to take up those four laws of the kingdom of God, and inquire how far your soul and life are under their control. Am I loving mine enemies as Christ loved me? Am I walking in single-hearted sincerity, doing all things as unto God, and not as unto men? Am I seeking the spiritual riches, and trusting in my Father's care? Am I doing to my neighbour as I would like him to do to me? If there has been any true reception of Christ as the way, the truth, and the life for our souls, then verily we must have turned away from the broad road of self-seeking and self-indulgence, and through the strait gate of sacrifice have entered on a new life. Bethink ye, then, whether ye have really taken up your cross to follow Him, crucifying wrath, revenge, hypocrisy, formalism, covetousness, unbelief, uncharitableness, and all unkindness. 'Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.'

XX.

CONCLUSION—FALSE PROPHETS.

‘ Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.’—MATT. VII. 15-20.

IN the previous lecture I tried to show you what our Lord means by the strait gate, and why it is called strait, and how we enter in at it, and how it is that there are few, alas! who find it. We then saw that Christ is Himself the door by which we enter into life; and that this door is strait, not from any proper limitations of God’s grace, for his Spirit is not straitened, but because human nature rebels against the self-denial which is implied in our really accepting the yoke of Christ. It is a strait gate, because it requires us to love our enemies, to do all things as to God and not as unto men, to set our affections on things above, trusting the Father’s care to provide for our other wants, and to do

to others as we would they should do unto us ; all which appear to our sinful flesh exceeding hard conditions, and therefore we are slow to enter in at that door. So Jesus complained, 'Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.'

And now, in the passage which falls to be considered to-day, He turns naturally from the strait gate which is Himself, to the wide gate which is the way of false prophets, whom therefore we are to beware of. We are exhorted to enter into Christ, and we can only enter into Him by accepting the great laws of the kingdom, which he has just laid down. He is the true prophet : he does not destroy God's law, but fulfils it by love, by sincerity, by faith, by brotherly sympathy ; Him therefore we are to believe, and obey. But there are false prophets of various kinds,—false Christs assuming the title of Messiah, false teachers coming in the name, but not in the spirit, of the Lord ; and they are the wide gate, and the broad road that leadeth unto destruction. Of whom now, and of their character, real and apparent, and also of the test by which we may discern them, and the end that awaits them, it behoves us to say somewhat this morning.

1. Christ warns us here to 'beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing.' There is allusion here, no doubt, to the symbolical garments of the prophets, with which His hearers would be so far familiar, having in their minds John the Baptist's girdle of camel's hair. It is like enough that 'sheep's clothing' was even more frequently used by them than camel's

hair, being symbolical at once of their shepherd character, and also of innocence and guileless simplicity. For the shepherd naturally dressed himself in the skins of his flock; and so we read in Hebrews xi. that God's faithful saints 'wandered in sheepskins and goat-skins,'—emblematic of their guileless character and pastoral office. Now, Christ gives us to understand here that others will come, wearing the prophetic robes which are easily put on; but not being true shepherds of the sheep, being rather like ravening wolves who care not, save to rend and to kill and to destroy. But of course this reference to the prophetic robes is comparatively superficial. It accounts so far for the striking and picturesque language in which the warning is conveyed. It is as much as to say, 'Not all who come to you in the garb of the prophets are to be received as prophets. The shepherd wears the sheepskin; but men who are no better than wolves may wear it too.' But it implies a great deal more than that. For he is a poor pretender, and will not long deceive any one, who has no deeper disguise than a piece of raiment. What our Lord means therefore, is that the wolf may cunningly enact the part of the lamb,—may look altogether as innocent, may speak apparently as good and kindly words, may falsely put on a manner, and affect a character, which are alien to his real nature, so that men may be deceived by him unto their own destruction. The sheep's clothing here is not a matter of dress only, but of religious profession and moral bearing; for without some plausible semblance of godliness the

false prophet would be easily detected, and would soon lose his errand. It behoves us therefore to inquire somewhat more narrowly into the special characteristics of those false prophets of whom we are warned to beware. And here you will note that they come, they are not sent; they come on their own errands, they are not sent on their mission by God. I do not like to attach too much meaning to mere incidental expressions. But I cannot help thinking that our Lord intended us to understand thus much, when He said that these false prophets *come* to us. And I am all the more persuaded of this, because I find in Deuteronomy xviii. that God denounced those prophets who presumed to speak a word in His name, which He had not commanded them to speak: for the ambassador must receive his commission from the king, and has no right to take up the task at his own hand. Of course, when I speak thus, I do not refer to a mere ecclesiastical sanction, as if that were equivalent to a Divine authority. It is a good thing, and in ordinary circumstances a necessary thing, that the Church of Christ should stamp with its approval those who are to be pastors and teachers of His flock. But one may get that sanction, and yet in reality may be going at his own will, and on his own errand. The commission of the Church is not a sufficient guarantee of the character of the prophet. Our call and qualification and mission must be from God; and this is, at least, one essential feature of the man whom God sends, that he does not seek his own things, but Christ's, does not

come on his own business, but to do the will of his Father. Therefore he who assumes this office for a piece of bread, or because it secures him in a certain social standing and consideration, or because he may hope thereby to obtain influence and glory by the exercise of his gifts, his talents, the usury of which belongs not to himself, but to God, or who in any other way, and with any apparent sanction, takes this business on himself, not for God's high ends, but for his own purposes, that man comes without being sent, and when ye discern the true nature of him, I say to you, Beware of him. He may have sheep's clothing, but the wolf is in his heart.

Observe further that these false prophets make a wide gate and a broad road for us; and that is perhaps the essential idea of their sheep's clothing. The True Prophet is himself the strait gate, as we have seen; and we have also seen in what respects it is justly called strait. Now the false prophet, whether he come avowedly in his own name to rival and oppose the Lord, or whether he assume the character of one of Christ's followers, always seeks to make the path of life easier than Jesus made it. He would fain do away with the cross; or at any rate make it lighter to carry; or, at the very least, he would change its nature, and give us another cross than Christ calls us to bear. He does not indeed always *appear* to make the gate wider. On the contrary, he seems at times to straiten it. But always you shall find that it is very much easier for a man to enter in at his gate than at the true gate of God.

Thus, on the one hand, the false prophet may call upon you to undertake a severe course of discipline, in the shape of voluntary humiliation and mortifying of the flesh, by means of fastings and scourgings and other bodily exercises, endured not by the will of God, but at our own hand : and it seems, at first sight, an exceedingly strait gate to have to enter in by such sharp and bitter courses. Yet when we look more narrowly, we shall find that it is far easier for human nature to submit to such demands than to accept of the terms which Jesus offers. It is much easier to fast often than to love your enemies. It is greatly more practicable to scourge the flesh than to do all things as to God, and not as to men. It is not nearly so difficult to practise the severest bodily exercises as it is to have no thought what we shall eat, and what we shall drink. The gate of the false prophet looks strait and hard, straiter even than the Lord's ; yet when we look more narrowly, we find it in truth a wide gate ; for that kind of bodily self-denial does not go down into the depths of our nature, and seek to root out its deepest sinful instincts ; consequently its cross is far more easily borne than the true cross of Jesus. It is the very same with those who represent the gate as being strait in virtue of some kind of limitation of Divine grace, whereby it is only open to a few chosen favourites ; for while they too make it far narrower than Christ has made it in one sense, yet in another aspect it is more agreeable to human nature to accept of such a doctrine than to close with the high demands of self-renunciation which form, as we have seen,

the great laws of the kingdom of God. And in like manner we might show that every apparent straitening of that gate, beyond the Lord's own word, is in reality a widening of it, and a lowering of the only terms on which we can enter into life. On the other hand, the false prophet frequently comes avowedly to proclaim an easier method of salvation. He does not perhaps say expressly that we are not bound to love our enemies, and to walk by faith, relying on the care of our heavenly Father. Rather, these deeper and more spiritual aspects of religion are quietly cast into the background; and people are led to believe that, if they fast and pray, and give alms, and keep times and seasons, and otherwise practise all the customary routine of piety, and believe all the customary doctrines of religion, then all shall be well with them, for that is the way of life. They may hate their enemies. They may do many things to be seen of men. They may be setting their whole hearts on the treasures that corrupt and perish. They may be bitterly uncharitable in their judgments. And yet the false prophet hath nothing but good words of comfort for them; for his is a wide gate, and his way is broad and easy; it is just the way of the Pharisees, and many there be that find it.

And herein, as we have said, lies essentially what our Lord means by his sheep's clothing. There may, indeed, be a reference in that phrase to personal character; for there are, no doubt, some who put on a hypocritical show of religion, and affect a great holiness of life, great love for souls, great desire to serve and

glorify God, and who, under covert of that, are in reality wolves heartless, selfish, and cruel. And there are others who, without any such conscious hypocrisy, and without any such loathsome contrast between their outward profession and their real character, are nevertheless essentially seeking their own ends, and not the good of the sheep, or only seek their good as far as that may consist with their own profit and comfort. And these are all manifestly false prophets, whose apparent piety and devotion are truly but a sheep's clothing, concealing the wolf, or at any rate the hireling. Still I cannot help thinking that our Lord's words here find their truest and deepest meaning, not so much in the character of the men as in the character of their teaching. The false prophet comes in sheep's clothing, that is to say, he comes with a message which looks very innocent, and is certainly far more easy and agreeable to our nature than the message of Christ. Oh, but he has pleasant things to say! His God is not a hard master; only he allows his servants to be hard. And so, with fine, smooth, peaceable words of seeming benevolence, he goes about in his sheep's clothing, with a gospel of salvation made easy, and men see not, nor does he himself see, that the wolf is in the heart of it, and destruction near at hand. Brethren, beware of the false prophet; he comes on his own errand; he is not sent on God's business; he makes a wide gate, for he turns aside from the gate of God; he wears sheep's clothing and speaks smooth words, but inwardly he is a ravening wolf, not perhaps seeking your destruction, but not the

less certainly effecting it for all that; for he leads you to think that salvation may be had, not by entering into Christ, not by accepting the law of the new life which is in Jesus, but in some other way which is not the way of life. Beware of the false prophet, then, and trust ye only in the Lord. But

2. Christ gives us a test by which he may be tried. 'By their fruits,' he says, 'ye shall know them.' He does not say, 'Ye shall know them by their doctrines.' I would not, indeed, have you to think that these are of little moment, or that ye are not to try the spirits by the standards of truth which the Lord has been pleased to reveal. In Deut. xiii. Israel was warned that, if a prophet gave them a sign or a wonder which came to pass, but the object of which was to turn them aside after other gods, they were not to hearken to the words of that prophet, nor give heed to the sign, for if the Lord permitted such a thing, he did so only to prove their hearts, whether they loved the Lord with all their souls. Thus the test of truth obtained a supremacy above even the proof of miracles. He who had received the knowledge of God was not to be turned aside from that by the signs and wonders of a supernatural power. The false prophet, therefore, is unquestionably to be tested by the word of the truth of the Lord. In what way this test is to be applied I will show you immediately. Meanwhile, let me say that, when Jesus tells us, 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' he would by no means have us to sit loose to the doctrine of His grace, as if that were a secondary matter compared with prac-

tical good conduct. For error is never safe, and it is always perilous to believe a lie; and the higher the subject is, the more danger is there in our mistake or falsehood. Thus, for example, in astronomy, a very small miscalculation in our measurement of the angle made to some distant star, will produce a mistake proportioned to the vast space between us and it; for as the lines are protracted, the distance between them becomes greater and greater. Practically there may be no great evil in this, because our lives are not much dependent on the exact measurement of such far-away objects; but the error is greater than any mere terrestrial miscalculation could be. Now, in like manner, if any error creep into the truth of God, it becomes serious, just in proportion to the exalted nature of the subject. The angle of our aberration, as it were, though apparently small in itself, becomes vast by reason of the infinite elevation of the matter with which we are dealing. And as the truth of God exercises so mighty an influence over our practical everyday life, it is impossible to calculate the mischief that may be wrought even by apparently slight departures from the very truth of the Lord. It behoves us, therefore, to exercise all care and diligence and faithfulness, and to keep the eye single, and the instrument right, and the mind true to its task, rectifying and removing, as far as we may, every source of mistake, so that we may obtain the pure and sincere word whereby we live and grow.

Still it is not specially the truth which is to be the test of the false prophet, but his fruits, or rather, it is

the truth, not in its mere intellectual aspect, but in its practical results. There has been in former times, and indeed there is still, a strong tendency to set up an elaborate standard of dogmatic opinion, carefully guarded and balanced and adjusted, so as to exclude all possibility of error, and this is made to be a kind of sieve to search out God's true prophets. Whatever it retains is treated as genuine, and all whom it cannot keep are regarded as spurious. Those who can accept its various propositions, honestly or dishonestly, intelligently or blindly, are to be accepted as well-accredited messengers of the Lord, and the brotherhood and communion of the servants of Jesus are made to depend on this doctrinal test, which is no proof that God sent them, no proof that their hearts are right, no proof that they have entered in at the strait gate which leadeth unto life. Now, I venture to say that our Lord, who knew what is in the heart of man, who knew all its doubles and deceits and evasions and snares, who knew, therefore, how utterly unfit any mere intellectual test was to discriminate who are His true prophets, and who are wolves in sheep's clothing, laid down here a rule for our guidance, which intentionally sets aside all tests of that kind, and told His apostles, and tells us, to remember that it is not by their opinions we shall know them, but by their fruits. Not that their opinions are undervalued; not that their doctrine is made light of; not that Jesus gives any countenance to the cold indifference which is careless of truth. Far otherwise. But what He would have us to understand is, that the test of a true

prophet, as of a real disciple, is not merely truth in its intellectual perception, but truth in its practical results; not by their ideas ye shall know them, but by their fruits.

‘Men do not gather grapes from thorns, nor figs from thistles;’ He says, in his usual pithy and picturesque language: ‘A good tree bringeth forth good fruit; a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit; and by their fruits ye shall know them.’ That is just as much as to say, that we are not to expect grace to flow from ungracious lips, or truth to come from false hearts, or godly teaching from ungodly men; and the proof of a man’s grace and truth and godliness is to be sought in two ways. It may be seen first and chiefly in himself. He who calls on us to enter in at the strait gate, must show some tokens that he has himself entered in. Does he love his enemies? Does he forgive those who hate him? Does he avoid all religious ostentation, living in his privacy a secret life with God? Does he labour for the bread which perisheth, or trust in the Father’s care? Is he sympathizing and considerate, doing to others as he would that they should do unto him? We must not inquire merely what are his views, but what practical illustration does he give of those views in his life; for if there is no indication that he has been grafted into Christ, how shall I hope to gather grapes of thorns, or good fruit from a corrupt tree? Nor is that the only way of applying this test. The fruit may be seen in others too; the effect of his teaching may be witnessed in those who hear him. I will not, indeed, make the

teacher responsible for all the bad conduct of his flock, nor yet give him entire credit for all the good they may do ; he is but a weak instrument, and sometimes he may labour apparently in vain, and sometimes God may give a blessing to his labour seemingly disproportioned to its power. But still it is legitimate and right to ask, What are the fruits of his prophesying ? Is he leading others to deny themselves, and take up the cross ? Is he seeing mercy spring up as the fruit of his gospel of mercy ? Is he overthrowing the strongholds of Pharisaic ostentation, and uprooting the deep-seated love of the world, and teaching men that charity which is the bond of perfection ? By their fruits ye shall know them. The true shepherd goes before his flock, and they follow him ; and if they are all on the narrow road, surely this will be more or less apparent, both in him and in them. And if not, if the teacher and his hearers are all given up still to wrath and display and worldliness and unbelief and uncharitableness, then, no matter what his views are, his sound doctrines, his estimation and honour in the Church, I say to you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, Beware of false prophets. I beseech you, brethren, to hold fast by this good word of the Lord. Fruits, not mere opinions, are the test of his faithful servants. Yet how often have we seen this overlooked and set at nought in the most deplorable way ! How often have we witnessed, in the course of the history of the Church, men filled with the spirit of Jesus, manifesting in a most holy walk and conversation their love of Christ and their love of souls, a mercy and a sincerity,

and a faithfulness, and a heavenly-mindedness, and a sympathy which rebuked the general Church ; and not only themselves doing this, but owned and honoured of God to bring many unto a like mind, so that the Father truly bore witness of them that He was with them and had sent them ; and yet, in spite of all that manifest and holy fruit, the Church hath again and again dis-owned and rejected such men, only for some trivial divergence of opinion, casting out of her fold some of her truest and noblest shepherds, and retaining many a dumb dog, who, for his own self-interest, would either hold his peace, or utter any shibboleth he might be required to utter. Brethren, it is mournful to think how little we lay the words of Jesus to heart, and this word among many has been miserably neglected, ‘ By their fruits ye shall know them.’

Finally, be it remembered, that every tree that beareth not good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. There is no doubt that this test of fruit-bearing applies to the disciple as well as to the teacher ; and that, consequently, this warning is given to the one as much as to the other. I have not dwelt on that, however, because logically the drift of our Lord’s words here appears limited to the false prophets, and because the larger application of the idea comes before us in the succeeding verses. I would therefore, in conclusion, only take to myself, and to all in a like position, those solemn words, ‘ Every tree that beareth not good fruit is hewn down.’ The prophet who is not faithful and true, who turns from the strait gate, and would widen it for the

sin and selfishness of men, and who is not himself illustrating the high and holy law of the new life in Christ Jesus, alas! for him, the unprofitable, dangerous servant, who yields no fruit unto God! He may do many things. He may teach sound doctrines; he may look harmless in his self-indulgence; but he is a wolf in sheep's clothing, and one day he and his work shall perish together.

XXI.

CONCLUSION—THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS.

'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.'—MATT. VII. 21-29.

THIS mighty Sermon now draws to its close with pointed application of its thoughtful teachings, and in words of singular majesty and solemnity and power. Picturing His thoughts still as He goes, the great Teacher crowds into these last sayings a number of striking images, each of them carrying its weighty lesson of instruction or reproof or warning, in such a form as to seize upon the imagination with a distinctness and impressiveness

that can never be effaced. We may not catch the whole meaning of them at first. Nay, the longer we look at them, the more we see in them. Their meaning deepens with our deeper vision. But some meaning at least is at once conveyed to the mind by each of those vivid pictures, and that in a way which can never be forgotten, for they cling to us with a most singular power and fascination. The strait gate and narrow way leading up to life; the wide gate and broad road going down to death; the wolves in sheep's clothing; the good tree with its good fruit;—all these physical emblems have become inseparably one with the spiritual truths which they so fitly express. For Jesus, the true prophet, is ever the strait gate; and false prophets who make a broad road for us are wolves in sheep's clothing; and true disciples are good trees yielding fruit in their season, for they do not merely cry, 'Lord, Lord,' but they do the will of the Father which is in heaven.

In considering now the verses we have read to-day, let me say that the repetition of the words, 'By their fruits ye shall know them,' while it forms an appropriate conclusion to the description of the false prophet, which was the subject of the previous paragraph, is also a fitting introduction to the description of the true disciple, which is the special theme of His concluding words. In my last lecture, you will remember I confined myself to the one point which was properly then before us, namely, the character of those described as wolves in sheep's clothing, and the test by which we were to ascertain that character. That test was fruit.

Men do not gather grapes from thistles ; and no more could a false prophet yield good fruit. To that single point, it seemed to me, we were then limited by the logic of the passage. But this test of fruit applies as much to the disciple as to the teacher. All that the Lord said on that subject therefore may be carried forward, being equally related to the verses which follow as to those that precede. In fact, the disciple, as well as the prophet, may be a wolf in sheep's clothing ; and him also we can know only by his fruit. The barren hearer with his fine professions is just as little worth as the barren teacher with his good words. Beware of both. Christ knows them not. Their house is built upon sand, and the day of their desolation is not far away.

In verse 21, then, our Lord describes the false and the true disciple ; and in 22 and 23 He introduces us to a scene where both false prophets and false disciples vainly plead with the Judge ; after which He concludes with that solemn parable in which the solid and the unreal hopes of all men are shown to be put to the proof, as by assault of a terrible storm, wherein the one edifice is swept away, while the other stands erect and calm amid the surges of the eternal waters. Let us look, then, at these verses in detail. And

1. The Lord describes the false disciples as men who cry 'Lord, Lord' to Him, but who bear no fruit. This language clearly implies that there are some who profess to be Christians, who acknowledge Jesus to be the Lord, and pray to Him as Lord, and praise Him as the Lord, who nevertheless have no part in Him. I do

not think that the description is limited to those people who yield Him only lip-honour and mouth-worship; hypocritical pretenders who, like the mixed multitude that hung upon the skirts of the true Israel, will always be found more or less loosely connecting themselves with the Church of God. Of course, it does embrace all these, but we should fail to catch the whole profound truth if we confined its application to them; and what is of more importance, we should not only fail to grasp His idea in its completeness, but we should probably lose its chief point and practical bearing on ourselves. For it is very likely that many of us to whom nevertheless these words are strictly applicable, could quite sincerely and honestly admit that all hypocritical pretenders who put on a mere cloak of religion do not really belong to the kingdom, and cannot enter into it. By restricting Christ's words in that way, we may easily put them past ourselves, and so lose all the benefit and blessing they are fitted to convey. Let me therefore say that this confession of 'Lord, Lord,' is symbolic of a sound creed, as well as a religious profession. It is as much as to say that there are many who believe, and are fully persuaded in their minds that Jesus is Lord and Saviour, many who entertain no doubt on that head whatever, having been well instructed in all the sound tradition of the Fathers, or having even diligently inquired into the matter for themselves, so that they have a most unhesitating belief in the doctrine of grace and of God, but who nevertheless are not true disciples of Jesus. Moreover, it is also implied that, in addition

to this sound and honestly accepted creed, they may also practise many consequent religious duties. They may pray to Him as Lord; they may praise Him as their Lord. And this also they may do in no consciously false, hypocritical spirit, but quite sincerely, just as sincerely as any other act of their lives, which they consider it is right and proper to perform. Thus they may believe the truth in a perfectly sound form, and they may do religious works in a true and honest spirit enough; and yet for all that they shall not enter the kingdom, either now or in the world to come. They may put forth abundant leaves and a glorious blossom; but the tree yields no fruit unto God. For any mere intellectual processes by which we obtain right convictions of the truth, may still leave the will in its natural alienation and rebellion, working only the unfruitful works of darkness. And any recognition of God and his Christ, in the shape of prayers and praises, may still leave the heart to serve its fleshly lusts and pleasures. It is found, alas! quite possible to interrupt the connexion between the mind that perceives the truth and the soul that consents to its power, and thus to put the machinery of life, as it were, out of gear, so that the force which ought to move it unto the high service of God is really spent and wasted, or only yields a vain cry of 'Lord, Lord,' and nothing more. Now those who are thus barren and unfruitful in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. They may be outwardly in the membership of the Church, honoured by it, pillars of it, and, alas!

even themselves persuaded that they are its ornament and pride. And yet they are not of it; they do not understand its spirit; they are ignorant of its sacred joy; they are really strangers and aliens, and not fellow-citizens with the saints, nor of the household of God. It is not merely that they shall not enter into the future heritage of blessing; but they are really now outside the strait gate, and they cannot enter in while they are of this spirit.

And now, further, the Lord gives us to understand that the true disciple is one who not only cries 'Lord, Lord,' but also doeth the will of his Father which is in heaven. It seems to me quite necessary here, as in the concluding words, to bear in mind that the man of whom the Lord here speaks, is one who both 'heareth his sayings, and also doeth them.' People are extremely apt to think that, as it is not enough to cry 'Lord, Lord,' without doing the works, therefore if we do these, it is quite unnecessary to cry 'Lord, Lord.' That is to say, they are still fain to separate faith and obedience. One says, I believe, and do not care to obey; the other says, I obey, and do not care to believe. Now, I have no hesitation in allowing that those who obey, even though they do not believe, are more acceptable to God than the opposite; and I am bold to say this, just because Jesus puts it broadly in one of His parables, in which he tells us of a father who had two sons, the one of whom said, 'I go,' and went not; while the other refused to go, yet afterwards repented and went; and He unhesitatingly affirms that it was the last who really

and only did the will of his father. But while I have no manner of hesitation in saying that obedience without faith is better than faith without obedience, I am quite as certain that what is really required of us, and what alone is really well-pleasing to God, is that we should both cry 'Lord, Lord,' and also do the will of our Father who is in heaven. For service without belief is really to obey, and to call God a liar; and belief without service is to believe, and make ourselves liars. Neither alternative, surely, is desirable; neither is right; neither is that which the Lord requireth of us. The true principle is to combine both: to call upon the Lord, and to do the works of the Father; to blend in one the characters of the two sons in the parable, both promising obedience and performing our promise, assenting and consenting to the will of God. This is the true disciple; we do not know him merely by his words, but by his fruits too. We do not know him only by his fruits, but by his faith too. He is not a sheep in wolf's clothing; still less is he a wolf in sheep's clothing; but he is one of the true sheep of the good shepherd, who both heareth his voice, and goeth after him. Those only who bear this character are in the kingdom now, or shall enter the kingdom hereafter. The leaf is nothing, and the blossom is nothing, unless the tree come to fruit; but leaf and blossom are much when they yield their harvest in due season. Profession is nothing, and belief is nothing, and prayer is nothing, when they go no further; but they are all of infinite moment when they lead to our doing the will of the Father. For then they

are clear and undeniable proof that the true life is in us, the faith which worketh by love, the grace that is manifest in godliness. I beseech you, brethren, to lay this earnestly to heart. Be not hearers of the word only, but doers of it also. Be not doers of the word only, but hearers of it too. True discipleship is alike faithful to the truth, and obedient to the law; and they are but wolves in sheep's clothing who cry 'Lord, Lord,' and yet do not the will of our Father who is in heaven. The whole scheme of salvation, the work of Christ, the gift of the Spirit, the revelation of the truth,—all are meant for this end, to turn us from our wayward and rebellious courses, and to establish the kingdom of God so that His will may be done on earth even as it is in heaven. And we are miserably deceiving ourselves if we go on crying 'Lord, Lord,' and yet remain barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Jesus. Wherefore give diligence to add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. And remember that a disobedient belief and an unbelieving obedience are equally unfit to enter the kingdom of heaven.

2. Having thus described the false and true disciples, the Lord goes on to remind us that there is a day coming when their characters shall be discovered and their judgment settled. The line of thought, if I may venture to paraphrase it, would seem to be somewhat to this effect: 'False prophets will come, and may deceive many with their fair speeches; false disciples

will join you, and they too with their "Lord, Lord," may persuade many that they are the real children of your Father. Nay, and not only so, but because the heart is deceitful, they may even convince themselves that, barren as they are, and disobedient as they are, yet in virtue of their sound creeds and religious professions and prayers to me, it is all well with them. Thus they may, all their life long, walk in the delusion of their own hearts, not knowing what manner of men they are, till they appear before me in the judgment. Yea, even there, they may begin to say unto me, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" But in vain. These are not the works of my Father. These are not the proofs of the true prophet, or true disciple. Then will I profess unto them, I know you not; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.'

In calling your attention to this passage, let me ask you to note that here as elsewhere the Lord calmly assumes to Himself the powers and attributes which belong only to God. Even throughout this Sermon, which has been supposed to be essentially different from some of his later teachings, the solemn 'I am He' crops up again and again, and compels us to feel that the difference between this discourse and those others is quite superficial, and that all which was afterwards discovered is here quietly assumed. When He spoke of the strait gate, we found that the only satisfactory explanation of the phrase was his own words in John, 'I am the door; by me if any man enter in he shall

have life.' Again, when He describes the false disciples, He tells us that they will say to Him 'Lord, Lord,'—offering to Him the adoration due only unto God, which He does not blame in itself, but only because it is not, in their case, accompanied with good works and fruits. And now, finally, though God is said to be the judge of all the earth, He, this man of sorrows, this meek and lowly One, calmly seats Himself as it were on the throne, and describes those people as coming in the great day to plead their cause before Him, and to receive their sentence from His lips. For even so it is, brethren. 'The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.' 'He hath appointed a day wherein He will judge the world by that man whom He hath ordained.' It is not God merely who judgeth, but God in Christ. Men will receive sentence from the Son of man. The lips that proclaimed Divine mercy shall also assert the Divine righteousness. And now, further, you will observe the principle which is to regulate the decisions of that judgment. In the 13th chapter of Luke we have another and very similar description of that solemn transaction, the idea in both being precisely the same. Here Jesus tells us that many shall then say 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?' There He says, 'They shall begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.' And in both cases His reply shall be, 'I know you not.' For it is not the possession of such gifts, or the performance of such works, or the enjoyment of such privileges, which will then anywise avail us. One may have prophesied in

the name of Jesus, preaching the gospel to others, and yet he himself may be a castaway ; one may have received gifts of miracles, and yet while his hand gave life to others, his own heart may have been cold and dead as a stone ; one may have sat at the Lord's table, yet never eaten of the bread of life ; one may have heard the grace and truth that flowed from His lips, and yet only heard unto his own condemnation. These are not witnesses that will avail us in the great day of the Lord. It is idle to summon them there ; idle to trust in them now. It is only the works which the Father doeth, that will then testify of us that we are His children. The works which bear witness of a pure heart, a true heart, a holy and spiritual character, and a merciful and loving spirit, these only shall profit us in that day. Justified by faith, we shall yet be judged by works ; for the fruits of the Spirit in us must justify the grace of God towards us. And if not, if we are evil trees bearing evil fruit, or barren trees bearing no fruit, if our religion lies only in opinions and privileges and gifts, but not in works of faith and labours of love ; then shall the Lord, the righteous Judge, on that day profess unto us, 'I know you not.' Men may have reckoned us His followers, but we have not walked in His footsteps. 'The Lord knoweth them that are his ;' but He will disown us, if we have not done the will of his Father. He knows our sin, our hypocrisy, our disobedience, and in that sense He has known us all along, and knew we were none of his. Ah ! but these are dread words : 'I know you not. I will no longer have my name associated with yours ; for ye have not

known me. Ye know not my grace and holiness, and truth and love. Depart from me, for ye are none of mine. Ye had high opportunities, and yet remained workers of iniquity; ye had holy privileges, and yet remained workers of iniquity; ye obtained precious gifts, and yet remained workers of iniquity. Depart from me; I disown you for ever; for ye have not done the will of my Father which is in heaven.'

3. The Lord now concludes the whole Sermon with one of those exquisite parables whose pictorial beauty and spiritual insight, always remarkable, are in this case elevated into a strain of solemn grandeur and awful impressiveness. Of course that parable rises most naturally from the immediately preceding warning in reference to the day of judgment. But equally of course, it stands in close relation also to the whole discourse which it so fitly concludes. You may say, the foolish builder is the man who heareth the words of the Lord and doeth them not, and who persuades himself that all is well because he crieth, 'Lord, Lord,' or because he prophesieth and doth many wonderful works in the name of Christ; whom nevertheless Christ will one day utterly disown, so that his house shall fall about him in a great and sorrowful ruin. Or, on the other hand, you may gather up the whole teaching of the Sermon,—its introductory beatitudes, its profound laws of love, truth, faith, and sympathy, and say that the foolish builder is the man who has not entered into the strait gate, thus clearly described, and asserted to be the only way of life, the only sure foundation on which

our hopes can rest. It matters not which view you take; the parable which quite naturally follows up the account of the judgment, also most fitly winds up the whole of this Sermon.

Let it be remembered that in tropical climates, the sudden tempest or tornado sweeps often with most destructive and desolating effect over a country, in a way of which we have no examples in these more temperate regions. Our storms are more frequent, and less severe, the force, as it were, being spread over a larger space of time. Theirs, on the contrary, are rare. Months pass without a breath of wind or a drop of rain. But when the quiet is disturbed, it is as if all the storms spread over our year were concentrated into a few hours. The wind tears up the stately cedars. The rain swells the brooks into desolating floods. And the slightly built houses of a people accustomed ordinarily to calm weather, are often swept utterly away, and whole villages and towns levelled with the ground. Such a storm David describes in Psalm xxix. saying, 'The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth; the Lord is upon many waters. The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, He breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. He maketh them also to skip as a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness. The Lord sitteth upon the flood.' In the parable, then, such a tempest is represented as coming on the houses of the wise and foolish builders; and that which is built upon

the rock endures the trial, while the other, which was founded on the sand, fell, and great was the fall of it.

The apostle Paul, in the third chapter of First Corinthians, uses a similar illustration, but indicates that every man's house shall be tried as with fire. He speaks of the one sure foundation, which is Christ, and warns us to take care, not only what we build, but how we build thereon. For the foundation is not everything; the structure also is of some moment. If a man build on the rock, gold, silver, precious stones, they shall abide the trial; but if he mingle them with wood, hay, stubble, that shall be burned, and he shall suffer loss, though he himself shall be saved. One may be a true Christian, and yet one may cherish wrong notions, delusive hopes, foolish expectations; stubble and hay which shall be tried with fire, and burnt. Still through the fire the true Christian shall pass, not without loss, yet not seriously injured. Rather, his loss will be gain, for the rubbish shall be removed, that the gold and silver only may remain. And in our Lord's parable we are quite entitled to find a similar lesson. The great idea of it indeed is, that we must build on a sure foundation. We are not to be hearers of the word only, but doers of it also. What we preach, and what we believe, that we must also be. And if you ask what that is, I can only refer you to all the previous part of this Sermon on the Mount. We must enter in at the strait gate, denying ourselves and taking up the cross, that we may obtain the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Then our hopes, resting on the Lord, shall be

founded on the rock ; but if not, alas ! they are built upon sand, and their ruin soon shall come. At the same time, we must also build the right kind of house on this foundation, otherwise when the storm comes, we are like to suffer loss. The stubble and hay will be washed away by the floods, as they would be burned away by the fire. Now, the right kind of house is indicated in the introductory beatitudes. Let a man be poor in spirit, mourning for sin, meek, hungering for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, faithful and steadfast amidst persecutions and other trials, and his house, resting on the rock, shall be all of gold, silver, and precious stones, whose stability the day will manifest. In this way the introductory beatitudes blend with the concluding parable, being linked together by the fine similitude of Paul. See then to it, that ye are both hearers of the word, and doers of it also. See that ye build on the right foundation ; see also that ye build the right kind of house upon it. For the day of trial shall come. And in that day he that heareth Christ's words, and doeth them, is like 'unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock ; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell not : for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand ; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell : and great was the fall of it.'

APPENDIX.

No. I.

I PRINT here the part of Lecture IV. which was omitted from the text, because the subject had been more satisfactorily treated in a subsequent discourse of the series :—

For, just consider a moment what the Lord proceeds to do after this large and decisive statement regarding the law and the prophets. It will be utterly impossible to get any clear understanding of the matter unless you pause here, and observe that Jesus, knowing what people thought, knowing how sharply suspicious they would be of any proposal to alter the minutest point of the law, and clearly anxious to remove any such distrust, and to produce a distinct conviction that He meant really to fulfil and establish all the law and the prophets, yet when He goes on to illustrate this position, does in point of fact directly abrogate some commandments, and so interpret others that the people could scarcely have recognised the old law in its new light. I might at this point, assuming the entire unity and equal authority of the teachings of our Lord and His apostles, remind you that very many of the most

cherished ordinances of Scripture—that is, of the law and the prophets—were abolished by Him, that is, in His name and by His Spirit, a few years after. Paul, for example, cast off the bondage of circumcision. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews swept away the whole Aaronic priesthood and their sacred rites. Unquestionably, many and very serious changes were made in the law and the prophets by those who had the mind of Christ, and who were specially anointed by the Holy Ghost to reveal all the fulness of His gospel. But at present I pass these by, and will confine myself to what our Lord expressly says in illustration of the principle that He came not to destroy, but to fulfil them. And omitting just now any reference to the exposition of the sixth, seventh, and ninth commandments, strangely as they must have sounded in a Hebrew ear, I ask you to note what He says in reference to the law, ‘an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ For the present, I confine our inquiry to that one point,—not because the same line of argument would not bear on some of the other illustrations, but because it is here perhaps most markedly, and significantly, and unmistakably apparent. For you will note that this saying, ‘An eye for an eye,’ is no Pharisaical interpretation of the law, but is distinctly, and even elaborately, enjoined in Exod. xxi. 24. Almost immediately after the utterance of the Decalogue comes this stern principle of exacting for every offence an equivalent penalty; and it is so clearly expressed that no interpretation could well make it more severe. Moreover, this same law cannot in any way be regarded as ceremonial or peculiarly Jewish. Indeed, it is rather noticeable that in all these illustrations which Jesus gives of His purpose with regard to the law, not one

will be found belonging to the ceremonial part of the covenant. This particular law, then, though not contained in the Ten Commandments, is certainly and essentially moral. The question whether we are to forgive those who do us wrong, or to exact the full penalty of their offences, is assuredly a part of the moral law, if anything is. Here then, brethren, is an unmistakable ordinance of Moses, not a false interpretation; here also is a moral principle—most clearly moral, not ceremonial; and yet He that said, ‘I am not come to destroy the law and the prophets,’ actually illustrated His principle, that He meant to fulfil the Scriptures, by asserting that we are not to demand an eye for an eye, but that whoever shall smite us on the right cheek, to him we should turn the other also. At this stage of our argument I am not going to do more than simply to ask you honestly, and in all fairness, to the great Teacher, to try and believe this much—that He knew whereof He spoke—that the seeming contradiction must have been quite reconcilable with His real position, and that He did not utter a confused babble which has to be put right by more exact and systematic divines. Alas for the exact and systematic divines! who have to set Christ right, and to keep Him in the right way! May I entreat you to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ knew quite well, knew better than we do, whereof He spoke when He selected an unquestionable law of Moses, an unquestionable moral principle of that law, and said that He was not destroying, but fulfilling the Scriptures, when He enjoined us not to demand a tooth for a tooth, but to overcome evil with good? Up to this point of the argument I ask no more than this. How the difficulty is to be explained is not the matter before us just now.

That will have to be looked at by and by. But surely I am entitled to demand of all Christian men, that when Jesus said He was come to fulfil the law, and when, in illustration of that fulfilment, He actually set aside one of its most clearly moral rules, He knew what He was about, and was not blindly floundering in a mess of contradictions, trying to reconcile his position with his convictions. I think, my friends, there must be some point at which we can see the harmony and consistency of Christ with Himself; and it is of more importance for us to obtain that position than it is to see how any man, or any class of men, or any set of opinions, can be harmonized with each other. Let Christ be true and every man a liar. And if ever we are to see the truth of His word here, we must keep these facts steadily before our minds—viz. *First*, That when He speaks of the law and the prophets, He means the entire Old Testament Scriptures; *second*, That an opinion had gone abroad to the effect that He intended to abolish these, which opinion He was anxious to repudiate; and *third*, That nevertheless, in the very act of repudiating it, He does in point of fact abrogate at least one of the Mosaic laws, and substitutes the very opposite moral principle in its room. These three things being clearly apprehended, we shall now be in a position to inquire what, then, is the precise bearing of this passage, ‘Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.’

No. II.

STIER, commenting on Matt. v. 17, says: “The law and the prophets,” taken together, are the name of the old covenant, yet not merely in the sense of the current manner of speech, . . . but with reference to those two aspects of the old covenant, upon which such a division was based, viz., *commandment* and *promise*. These two fundamental elements, however, so thoroughly interpenetrate one another, that the whole, the legal as well as the prophetic word, the legal as well as the prophetic institution, may be regarded as comprising both; the one element commanding the fulfilment of the fore-announced will of God, and the other pointing in prophecy to the future, which alone will bring this fulfilment. He who does not thus understand the Old Testament has not yet even begun to understand it; its double name is its only right name. It is a law which has not yet found its corresponding obedience, and which yet must and shall be done; it is a promise which yet waits its fulfilment. *When this has come, it becomes an old testament, and gives place to the new.* But this new testament, again, is no other than the truth and reality of the old, its *fulfilment*, which can alone bring it, as old and precursory, to an end. Oh that our critics of the present day would understand this; whose entire but idle toil is expended upon the vain endeavour to rend asunder the two testaments of God, to unbend the law and the prophets, and then to regard Christ as one who has come, but who fulfils nothing and nothing brings.’—STIER, *Words of Christ*, vol. i. p. 131.

Again : 'What is *the law*, of which our Lord here speaks? Assuredly not merely the unaptly so-called moral law of the Ten Commandments ; for Israel had learned nothing in Scripture of any such improper division of that one entire law, which the Lord had given them in various commandments and moral precepts and statutes. To that same law belongs, in inseparable unity with it, what we term the ritual and civil law ; all is together but one will of God, which is to be established in the obedience of His holy people.'—*Ibid.* 131-2.

Again : 'The actual fulfilment of the Old Scripture was at the same time, to some extent, *an abolishing fulfilment*, inasmuch as that which was preparatory ceases through its completion, the shadow retires before the substance, and the shell, which enclosed and concealed the kernel, drops from it.'—*Ibid.* p. 137-8.

Olshausen observes, on the same passage :—'*The law and the prophets* is a general denomination for the entire writings of the Old Testament. . . . The Old Testament is the foundation on which the building of the New Testament is to be placed, in order to complete it. In this comparison the Old Testament contains the outline (*μόρφωσις*, Rom. ii. 20), and the New its filling up ; the two are in organic connexion, like bud and blossom. The fulfilment is therefore to be regarded as a comprehensive one ; Christ fulfils not only the prophecies and types of the Old Testament, but the moral law also He fulfils perfectly in Himself and His people.'—OLSHAUSEN, *Com.* vol. i. p. 200.

The following remarkable passage in Dr. Martensen's *Christian Dogmatics* has come to my knowledge since these Lectures were delivered. Dr. Martensen is, I

understand, a bishop in the Danish Lutheran Church ; clearly also a man of ability and ample learning, and, allowing for sacramental theories, altogether evangelical. He says,¹ 'For Christians the Old Testament is sanctioned only by the New ; and no canonical authority can belong to it, except what belongs to the preparatory testament, after that of the fulfilment has come. On account of its profound organic connexion with the New Testament, it is of importance, not only as an exegetical auxiliary in the study of the New Testament, but as the delineation of the way in which God led and trained His chosen people. As the chosen instrument of the law and of prophecy,—as the type and foreshadowing of the eternal treasures, it will always be profitable for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Hence we reject the Gnostic view of the Old Testament, that it is of no account to the Christian Church ; but no less do we reject the Jewish view, which would retain in the Christian Church the Old Testament as an independent canon by the side of the New Testament. For the Old Testament is not *ιδίως ἐπιλύσεως* (of private interpretation), but if it is to serve for Christians as PRESENT truth, it must first be interpreted *πνευματικῶς*,—i.e., from the stand-point of the New Testament, as we see it done especially by the apostle Paul. This is true even of the Psalms and Prophets, the most evangelical portions of the Old Testament. For, rich and exhaustless as are the treasures therein contained for the illumination and edification of the Church, yet the contents cannot be received by the Christian mind as present truths, without being regenerated by the new spirit of Christianity, and in various respects reconstructed.'

¹ Martensen's *Christian Dogmatics*, pp. 53-4—Clarks' Foreign Series.

In Dr. John Owen's Commentary on the Hebrews, I find the following note on chap. vii. 18, 19 :—' It is not the peculiar command for the institution of the legal priesthood that is intended, but the whole system of Mosaic institutions. For the apostle, having already proved that the priesthood was abolished, he proceeds on that ground, and from thence, to prove that the whole law was also, *and in like manner*, abolished and removed. . . . Nor is it the whole ceremonial law that is intended by "the command" in this place, but the moral also, so far as it was compacted with the other into one body of precepts for the same end.'—OWEN *on Hebrews*, vol. iii. pp. 544-5.

Still more clearly, Dr. Knapp, one of the evangelical party in Germany during last century, writes :—' The laws of Moses are of different kinds, and many of the older theologians maintained that Christ abolished only the ceremonial and civil law of the Israelites, and not the moral law, especially that contained in the Decalogue. But in the passages of the New Testament which treat of the abolition of law, there is no allusion to this threefold distinction. Paul includes the whole under *νόμος*,—Rom. vi. 14 ; Gal. iii. 19, 25. Besides, many of the laws of Moses which are truly moral, are expressed and stated in such a way as to show plainly that they were designed, *in that form*, only for the circumstances and wants of the Israelites at the time being.' Dr. Knapp then goes on to show that moral laws are in their nature universally obligatory and unalterable, but that they are not binding on us Christians, because they are found in the Mosaic code, but because they are founded in the constitution which God has given us, and '*because Christ has commanded us to obey them.*'¹

¹ Knapp's *Christian Theology*, p. 365, translated by Woods of Andover.

I add here a number of theses on the subject, by Professor Delitzsch, which I am permitted to print. I may explain that, while the Presbytery was proceeding in the matter, a friend of mine who was then at Erlangen, unknown to me, brought the question under Dr. Delitzsch's notice. The result was the production of these theses, which were forwarded to me at the time, though I did not then feel at liberty to use them, except by a passing reference to a single expression in No. VIII. of the series. In now allowing me to publish the whole, Dr. Delitzsch writes to my friend that while he has no objection to their being printed, he begs to observe that 'they were hastily conceived, in a friendly conversation, as basis of discussion ; and that, though not deducing the duty of the ceremonial observance of the Sunday directly from the Mosaic law, he does not ignore the blessings of a Church-and-State protected celebration of the Lord's day for a Christian people ; and that the theses are not to be understood in an antinomian sense.' He adds also a hope that 'this delicate question may be so treated that libertinism will draw no false conclusion from it.' As I had not in any way referred to the Sabbath question, I was at one time minded to omit that portion, being reluctant to open up any new matter. But that would have been to take a liberty with Dr. Delitzsch's theses which I did not feel myself entitled to take. I have therefore printed it entire, with his own explanation of his meaning, in which I heartily concur :—

RELATION OF THE MOSAIC LAW TO CHRISTIANITY.

I. The Mosaic law is not a law for man *as man*, but for a people; and, therefore, it is not the pure and perfect expression of the holy will of God.

II. It follows from the national character of the law, that the Mosaic law justifies war, that it makes partial (unfair) differences between fellow-countrymen and foreigners, that it admits polygamy, that it does not prohibit divorce, and so forth, because it accommodates itself to their *σκληροκαρδία*.

III. It is manifest that the Mosaic law accommodates itself to the stage of culture (of the people), and to the relation (condition) of the land, and to the political and religious position of this people among the surrounding peoples.

IV. In short, the Mosaic law is the expression of the Divine will within national (*i.e.*, temporal and local) limits, binding where the true will of God permits, and allowing where the true will of God prohibits;—*e.g.*, binding in respect of eating and drinking, and allowing in respect of polygamy, of hostility, of usury.

V. Jesus Christ has abrogated this law, as only the limited, and, as it were, prismatically broken, revelation of the Divine will, and has substituted the perfect and universal revelation of the Divine will, not depending on any time or place, relating to man as man, without national distinction.

VI. The God of the two dispensations is the same. The Mosaic law has a pedagogical tendency (character), compared with that revelation which the Sermon on the Mount, and in general the New Testament, introduces; it is to be considered from the point of view of the education of a people, still in a state of minority.

VII. Even the Decalogue shares in this character of the whole. The prohibitions, as they read, are directed only against external sins, not against the inner affections; and they are so fashioned in the two last prohibitions [*viz.*, our tenth commandment, divided by the Lutherans into two], as the relations of the people demand it. Even the fourth commandment [Lutheran third] belongs to this class,

because in the celebration of the Sabbath, the command is given to the people of Israel as a people. The Sabbath is in itself a holy day, as the day of the Divine rest after creation ; but its ceremonial celebration was commanded only to Israel.

VIII. There must be a distinction in the Mosaic law between what is temporal and what is eternal : and the touchstone of the eternal is the legislation of Christ, which has distinguished between kernel and shell, essence and accident, substance and shadow, spirit and letter, and has brought in the perfect instead of the elements of the world, liberty instead of slavery, majority instead of minority (pupillage), humanity instead of nationality, universality instead of state-particularity, general love instead of partiality, and has revealed the face of the Holy Love without the veil of Moses.

IX. The law was given by Moses, a human mediator ; but the New Testament revelation is given by a Mediator who is God and man in one person ; and, therefore, the law is Divine revelation *radio reflexo*, the New Testament is Divine revelation *radio directo*.

BS

10121

2532

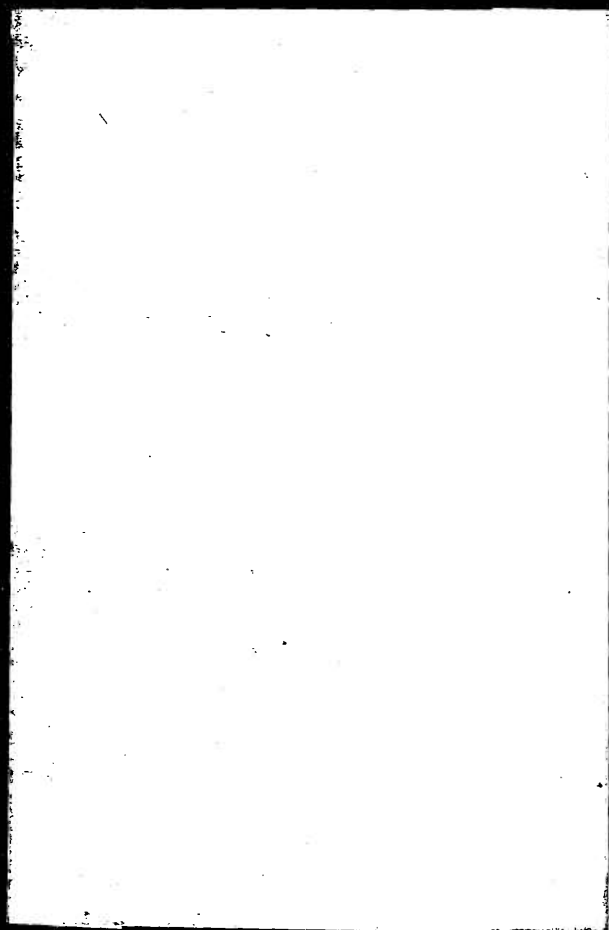
SMITH

.S64

The sermon ON
The MOUNT.

10-21-37

W. B. West, Jr. 10-21-37



UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



50 711 081

